



Riverview Clinic

Osteopathic Information Service

Babies and children

Can osteopathy help my child?

Many common problems suffered by babies and children can be treated effectively with osteopathy.

Problems often suffered by babies:

- crying and irritability, especially when lying down.
- feeding difficulties.
- sickness, colic and wind.
- sleep disturbances.

Problems often suffered by older children:

- musculo-skeletal problems.
- susceptibility to infections and a depleted immune system.
- ear infection, sometimes with a loss of hearing and 'glue ear'.
- sinus and dental problems, with a constantly blocked or runny nose.
- behavioural problems and learning difficulties, including poor concentration, fidgeting, difficulty in sitting still and hyperactivity.
- headache, other aches and pains.
- asthma and vulnerability to chest infections.

Osteopathy can also help children suffering from cerebral palsy or Down's Syndrome.

Could my child suffer an adverse reaction to osteopathy?

Often, after treatment, the baby or child is very relaxed and sleeps well. Others have a burst of energy, and then have a good night's sleep. Occasionally children feel unsettled, but this is a temporary situation that happens when mechanical changes are occurring, and only lasts for a day or two.

At what age should my child be treated?

Children of any age can benefit from osteopathy. It is never too early to start, and for best results treatment should begin before the age of five. Early treatment reduces hindrances to growth and limits the severity of any developing learning difficulty.

Osteopathy for babies and toddlers

Many of the problems that babies and children suffer are caused before, during and immediately after birth, and the child may be left with uncomfortable stresses within its head and body. These stresses can lead to problems such as suckling and latching-on difficulties, irritability, colic, wind and disturbed sleep patterns. Toddlers may suffer from difficulties with mobility and play, and they may sit, crawl and walk early, seeking movement to relieve physical discomfort. Sleep patterns are disturbed, teething may be uncomfortable and head banging or pulling at the hair may occur.

Osteopathic treatment can bring about significant improvement in these cases, and has particular success in treating the problems suffered by premature babies. These babies inevitably suffer stresses and trauma during birth and then further stress from the equipment that needs to be used to stabilise their condition.

Osteopathy for children and teenagers

Distortions to the head can continue to hinder the growth and development of a child's brain as it grows older. The child's behaviour may be volatile, and they may have problems with coordination and physical development. They may be vulnerable to chronic ear infections, glue ear, headaches, growing pains and stomach aches. They may be habitual mouth breathers, and suffer from developmental problems such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The child's posture may suffer too, with the head being held on one side, or one shoulder held higher than the other.

During the teenage years, the body frame undergoes a number of changes. Problems may occur because of an exaggerated spinal curve or because of mechanical changes that occur through osteochondritis – a self-limiting condition that causes a distortion of the bone. Other problems are caused by sporting and recreational activities that carry the risk of sprains and strains.

If these problems are left undiagnosed and untreated they can worsen in later life. Osteopaths can help the body frame adjust to the postural demands made on it. By analysing, treating and managing problems associated with growth, osteopaths make a major contribution to ensuring that young people stay fit and healthy.

Osteopathy in action

Alex is a boy of 12 who suffered from regular and severe headaches, causing him to miss at least a day a week from school. Medication helped to reduce the intensity but not the frequency of the headaches. On examination by an osteopath, Alex's posture was found to be the primary cause of the headaches. He had flat feet and his knees were locked back and held together. He had relatively weak abdominal muscles and stronger back muscles, and threw his weight forward into a sway-back posture. Osteopathic treatment helped improve and develop his posture so that it would support him as he grew. Alex now suffers only occasional headaches, which don't usually require medication or time off school.

Alice is two and until recently suffered from hearing loss. She consistently failed hearing tests from the age of eight months and suffered from nasal congestion. Osteopathic examination found tightness through the base of her skull, face and upper cervical spine. This was leading to a reduction of drainage of the naso-pharynx and poor functioning of the Eustachian tube. Osteopathic treatment reduced this compression and improved the mechanical functioning of the upper neck. Alice's hearing improved significantly after only two treatment sessions.

Baby James cried all the time. He was constantly hungry but couldn't feed for more than a few minutes without getting distressed. His birth had been easy but very fast, causing his head to be cone-shaped and the area around his right eye to be bruised. An osteopath found that James couldn't move his jaw in a correct manner as there was restriction of the temporal bone and cranial base. This meant that he couldn't open his mouth wide enough to latch on or suckle effectively. Treatment to the base of his head allowed the jaw joint to move in the correct way. There was immediate improvement after the first treatment session, and James was feeding easily after the second.