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LOW BACK PAIN and Osteopathy



The aim of this small leaflet is to explain to you something about the condition of low back pain and how osteopathy can help.

Statistics show that at some point in our lifetime, 88% of us will experience a bout of acute back pain. For many, this episode will be relatively short-lived, but for others it may develop into a chronic situation which could severely affect the quality of life.

Low back pain is no respecter of persons. It can cause problems in all age groups and whatever the social standing. It may be mild or it may be so acute as to make it impossible to stand up never mind walk or work and can make life itself almost unbearable. As a consequence, millions of working days are lost each year through back pain.

It all sounds a bit depressing doesn't it? But not all is doom and gloom, there is much more that can be done. The causes of low back pain are numerous, some of which are much quicker and easier to deal with than others but it would be wise, first of all, to have a brief anatomy lesson to help you understand how the spine works.

In simple terms, the spine is a collection of building blocks, (the vertebrae) with a shock absorbing pad in between each block (the intervertebral discs). A pair of hinge joints (called facet joints) forms part of each vertebrae and this allows the spine to move so far and no further. A system of ligaments connects the bones together to stop excess movement and a further system of muscles then directs the whole apparatus to perform the movements we know so well, namely: bending, twisting, straightening, stretching etc. If anything goes wrong anywhere in this complex, then there is the possibility of pain, stiffness or disability.

So how can osteopathy help and what does a visit to an osteopath entail?

Nearly 40% of the problems we treat at the practices in Stone and Stafford are related to the low back so it is something of which we have wide experience.

The very first thing we would do is to take a careful case history to find out what happened initially to cause the symptoms. This is then followed by an examination (for which you would generally be required to undress down to underwear.) At this point, we are looking for any asymmetries in your bones, muscles and joints which may or may not be relevant and also to observe the way in which you stand. We would then ask you to conduct various movements to establish any painful patterns and also to assess how freely you can move in any given direction.

It may be at this point that we would need to do various other tests to help clarify things, such as: checking reflexes, testing muscle strength, testing for any areas of pins and needles or numbness etc. (there may be occasions when it is necessary to refer you for X-rays, scans, blood tests or recommend that you see a specialist in another medical discipline).

Once all this has been done we would then start to feel how your joints and muscles are moving and working. This is the area for which osteopaths are so well known as we have spent many years honing the skills of touch, not only to feel how far your joints move, but also the quality of movement and how this could be

relevant to your particular problems. It may well be that your back problem is not even a back problem at all, but is being caused by some other problem somewhere else in your body!

The Osteopaths job is to find out what has gone wrong and why it has gone wrong, then, with knowledge and experience, put things right! As well as using our hands to apply treatment we may well be helping you to address other areas in your lifestyle which could be holding you back from undergoing a full recovery. So we could be recommending specific rehabilitation exercises for you, or even dietary advice, or maybe pointers to help you get over any stress situations which are contributing to your pain.

As you can see, it is quite a long and complicated process to establish a full picture of what is causing your problem. In the vast majority of cases, however, low back pain does not need to be the end of the world. The success rate with osteopathic treatment is, in fact, very high, so please feel free to contact us to discuss your problem to see how osteopathy could be of benefit to you.

If you have any further questions regarding low back pain that have not been covered here, or in fact anything to do with how Osteopathy could help you, then please feel free to ring either of the practices to speak to one of the Osteopaths in attendance.