

CHEST COMPLAINTS and Osteopathy

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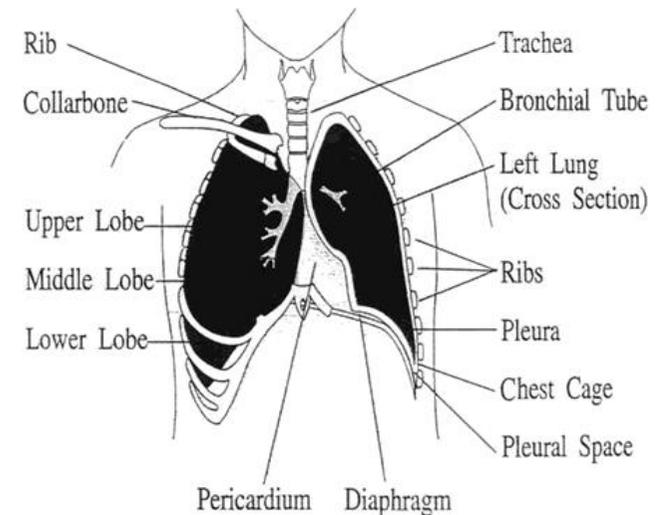
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The aim of this small leaflet is to explain to you something about chest complaints and how osteopathy can help.

Chest complaints are very common for a variety of reasons, but generally, a lot can be done to help alleviate the symptoms. First of all, let's briefly examine how the chest works which will, hopefully, help your understanding of how chest problems develop.

Respiration is defined as the moving of oxygen from the atmosphere into the cells of the body and the moving of carbon dioxide from the cells back into the atmosphere.

The lungs are expanded and contracted by the movement of the ribs and the diaphragm and so move the oxygen and carbon dioxide in and out of the tubes of the lungs (bronchioles). These bronchioles end in tiny sacs (alveoli) where the gases are exchanged in the blood that circulates around there. Incidentally, a pair of lungs contains about 250 million alveoli.

Anything that hinders the passage of oxygen or carbon dioxide is therefore going to affect respiration and consequently, affect the whole body. One of these hindrances may be the ability of the lungs to expand and contract (lung compliance). In simple terms: if the compliance is limited, then the lungs won't work properly.

Any condition that destroys lung tissue or blocks the alveoli or causes swelling in the lung will affect the lung compliance as will as any bony abnormalities such as a twisted spine (scoliosis) or bent spine (kyphosis). Also, the chest can actually change shape in some clinical conditions such as asthma, and further affect the lung compliance.

So, what can be done?

If you consider that osteopathy deals with the mechanical component of disease, it is possible for your osteopath to work on the spine, ribs, diaphragm, chest and back muscles and so improve the compliance of the lungs and therefore improve the efficiency of the lungs in the process. With the approval of your G.P. it may then be possible to reduce your dependency on any drugs which you may be currently needing.

Take, for example, an asthma sufferer. Asthma is a partial obstruction to the airways in the chest that varies in severity over short periods of time. A typical attack involves wheezing, coughing, and difficulty breathing with the sufferer being able to breathe in (inspiration) but having great difficulty breathing out (expiration).

In inspiration, various muscles of the chest lift the ribs so increasing the volume of the chest itself. The diaphragm also flattens out, thereby increasing the volume even more. The tubes which carry the air through the lungs also have a muscular coat and can contract and relax and alter the volume even further. Expiration, by contrast, is very much a passive affair with all the muscles mentioned above allowing the chest to shrink and so force the air out of the lungs. In asthma, this relatively straight forward manoeuvre goes wrong.

Asthma usually starts in childhood or middle age and commonly affects people who develop anti-bodies (the human body's defence) against common materials encountered in our everyday lives. A childhood runny nose and eczema are common indicators of this. The allergic reaction

is mainly caused by particles that are inhaled such as pollen, dust or animal hair. Some foodstuffs may also cause attacks such as eggs, milk, fish, certain fruits and chocolate.

Most asthmatics will wheeze after prolonged exercise or after inhaling cold, dry air. This is because the lining of the air passages become cold and dry and therefore constrict and limit the airflow. Emotional problems as a result of anxiety or frustration may contribute to the attack

The first step is to see if there is any allergic reaction which could be avoided and your doctor will be able to prescribe medication to allow the air passages to open more easily. Osteopathy can assist greatly in treatment by helping the chest muscles and diaphragm to relax and also by improving the ability of the ribs to move up and down more easily and so allow the air trapped in the lungs to escape.

If you have any further questions regarding chest problems 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.