

CHILDREN and Osteopathy

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The aim of this small leaflet is to explain to you something about children and how osteopathy can help in their health and development.

The birth of a child is a most amazing experience, but the process itself can be very traumatic for the baby (and for the mother!) As this new life negotiates the birth canal, the head and body are squashed, squeezed and twisted long before the eyes catch their first glimpse of the big, wide world or the ears hear their first sounds from jubilant parents!

Fortunately, the human body is remarkably resilient and in most cases everything goes back into shape afterwards, but it is by no means always the case. Sometimes parts of the head in particular do not return to a normal shape. This in itself is not necessarily important, but there are occasions when these asymmetries (which we call retained moulding) can cause problems soon afterwards and even into later life.

There appears to be a link between this retained moulding and a number of medical conditions: infantile colic for example, or children who go on to develop problems with sleep patterns or difficulty with concentration or even behavioural problems can have their root cause in the birth process. Some of these symptoms of course, can be related to the home environment, but in many cases it is very much associated with the situation that occurred at birth.

So what can osteopathy do about it?

Many people are under the misconception that osteopaths only treat backs and muscle strains and the like, but in fact osteopathy has a much broader effect. Osteopathy is not a collection of techniques that are carried out on a patient until they get better, but rather it is much more of a philosophy of health.

The body is designed to maintain itself in a state of balance and equilibrium, and to correct itself when things go wrong, however, sometimes this self correcting mechanism can't cope with the stresses that living a modern life place upon it.

If the body has never fully recovered from the stresses of birth, then the ability to self adjust can be compromised resulting in all sorts of problems, some of which have been listed above. When we therefore give any treatment, we are looking and feeling for any of these asymmetries and by gentle treatment will endeavour to correct them.

The joy of treating children and babies is that their tissues are young and pliable and very amenable to the gentlest of approaches. A common area for problems is at the base of the skull where a nerve passes through on its way to the stomach. If this area is compressed it can effect normal digestion and give rise to symptoms of colic. Freeing of the area very often quickly relieves these symptoms.

The temporal bone, which is just under the ear, can be the cause of other problems. This area is commonly compressed at birth but if any asymmetry persists, drainage from the middle part of the ear is compromised and there is an increased likelihood of ear infections, which, if occurring frequently, can give rise to a condition known commonly as 'glue ear.'

It might be easier to illustrate how osteopathy works with some of these situations by quoting a case history: Jane was a healthy, bouncy baby but who never seemed to settle well for sleep.

As she grew older she always seemed to be fidgety and lively and prone to continual temper tantrums. She also habitually wanted to bang her head on the floor or the nearest wall. Careful inspection showed that her head was markedly out of alignment. She quickly responded to gentle, corrective treatment and her symptoms rapidly subsided.

Treatment of babies and children is very common place in osteopathic practice and specialist clinics have been set up in London and Manchester. We also have connections at the practices here with an orphanage in China where osteopathic treatment has been used to help some of the children. Further visits are planned.

Every child is unique, so if you have any concerns regarding the development of your child there is a good possibility that an osteopathic approach may well be the answer. The leaflet entitled: 'Cranial Osteopathy' may also help to explain some of the ideas which have been touched on here.