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Migraine and Osteopathy



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

How many times have you heard it said: “Sorry, we can’t do this or we can’t do that because someone in the family has a migraine!” No matter how hard you try to ‘pull yourself together’ it just doesn’t happen! Once a migraine is there, it has to take its course. That nice meal out, or that long awaited evening with friends will have to be cancelled yet again! It can happen so often that life becomes a misery and no matter how long suffering and caring everyone else around you tries to be, it can really get you down.

Although it doesn’t really do justice as to how debilitating it can be, in purely medical terms, migraine is simply defined as: “a recurrent intense headache, usually confined to one side of the head and associated with nausea, vomiting and visual disturbances.”

Surveys of the general public show that about 10% admit to experiencing the above symptoms. The cause remains a mystery but occasionally the onset may be linked to times of stress, relaxation or eating certain foods such as chocolate, or cheese. Migraine is more common around puberty, at the menopause, just before the start of a period and can occur more often and more severely with the contraceptive pill. It can also occur in relation to high blood pressure.

The headache itself, which is often of a throbbing nature, is probably due to engorgement of blood vessels with stimulation of nearby nerve endings. Other symptoms such as tingling of the limbs or weakness are caused by a lack of blood to certain parts of the brain.

There are, in fact, several types of migraine varying from periodical headaches to major attacks with all sorts of associated symptoms and signs.

Prior to an episode some people can feel a great sense of well being, this can be followed by certain visual disturbances such as flashing lights, jagged lines, loss of part of their visual field of vision, or even temporary blindness in one eye. There may also be some difficulty with speech.

These symptoms can last for an hour or so before the headache starts, usually on one side, followed by nausea or being sick. The sufferer usually prefers to be in a darkened room as bright light makes the headache worse. The attack may go on for a few hours before subsiding and ending in sleep and there may be a tendency to pass larger amounts of water.

You may well be able to relate to some or all of the above symptoms whether you suffer very badly and very frequently or just have the occasional episode once or twice a year. Either way, osteopathy could be beneficial to you.

You may also need to pursue any dietary factors that may be starting off an attack, or if you are taking oral contraceptives it is worth checking with your G.P. to see if there is some connection there. Your Osteopath will go over all the possibilities with you and then see if osteopathy can help. This involves a careful case history followed by an examination to see what is happening throughout your body that might be triggering the attacks.

Osteopathy has a good track record with treatment of migraine sufferers. In many cases the frequency and severity of the episodes will decrease or even go completely! This is achieved by gently working around the head, neck and shoulders and working on the bones of the skull itself. (Please ask for the separate handouts entitled; ‘Cranial Osteopathy’ and also ‘Osteopathy and Neck and Arm Pain.’)

These methods appear to improve the blood supply within the head and also to desensitise the nerve endings.

Migraine can severely disrupt the quality of life so if you are reading this and are a sufferer yourself then you will know from bitter experience what we mean! But it is not life threatening as such and frequently, much can be done to help.

If you have any further questions regarding migraine 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.