

NECK & ARM PAIN and Osteopathy

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

The vast majority of neck complaints have one of three possible causes:

1. Trauma.
2. Posture.
3. Tension.

However, before we look at these in any more detail, it would be a useful exercise to find out a bit more about how the neck works.

There are seven cervical vertebrae which make up the neck, and together with the muscles working on them, allow the neck to rotate, tilt back and forward and also from side to side. There is a disc-like shock absorber between each bone (apart from the top two articulations).

Nerves come out between each vertebrae and send branches down the arms to the hands and also some up to the head. A large central hole through each bone (called the spinal canal) takes the spinal cord down through the rest of the spine from which nerves branch off to go to the rest of the body and, eventually, to the legs and feet. An artery runs through the vertebrae and supplies some of the blood to the base of the brain.

As you can therefore understand, there are a lot of sensitive tissues around the neck which can be damaged by anything from a car accident, a sports injury or a fall.

There are more subtle ways as well in which the neck can cause pain or ache, such as sitting in front of a computer screen for long hours, or driving a car in busy traffic. Tension builds up in

the muscles and the neck and shoulders get tighter and tighter, often resulting in headaches, fatigue and irritability.

The neck is a common sight for wear and tear arthritis as well. The discs between each vertebrae wear thin, the little hinge joints end up taking the weight and consequently, start to wear out. The neck eventually becomes very stiff and creaky. It's not unusual at this point to get irritation of the nerves down the arms, resulting in tingling, pins and needles or even weakness in the hands.

Your osteopath will try to identify the root of your problem and will know from training and experience how best to approach the situation. In some traumatic cases it may first be necessary to obtain an x-ray or scan to establish the extent of the damage. Some other clinical tests may also be necessary such as reflex testing, touch sensitivity, muscle tone and muscle strength. Together with looking at your posture and any related stress or tension in your life style, your osteopath can therefore build up a picture of what is happening to your body in general, and your neck in particular.

Osteopathic treatment can then be directed, as appropriate, to improve the way in which the neck is functioning. This usually involves working on the soft tissues around the head and shoulders to reduce muscle tension, or there may be more specific techniques on certain joint restrictions.

If there is a long standing postural problem, this may need to be addressed by looking at the way

in which your whole body has adapted to a particular problem. In a stress related situation there may also be a need to sort out some practical ways to reduce any stress in your life to a more manageable level.

We do see a lot of whiplash injuries in our work as a result of road traffic accidents. These injuries can be particularly harrowing as the forces generated in such a situation can be enormous! There is often a resultant loss of confidence and reluctance to drive again, together with the worry of the damage already caused to the motor vehicle. Insurers and solicitors are usually involved and the whole process can easily drag on for months and months. Amazingly, x-rays and scans are often negative and you can easily get the feeling that people think you are imagining the pain! This in itself can be very frustrating as all you want to do is get rid of the aches and pains that seem to dominate every minute of your waking life. Fortunately, the success rate with osteopathic treatment is very high and although it is seldom a miracle cure, steady treatment over a period of time usually produces good results.

The neck is a very complex area of our anatomy, so, of necessity, this is just a very brief outline on the osteopathic approach to neck and arm pain. As always; if you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at one of the practices and we will do our best to help