

Osteopathy – It's not just about back pain

Whilst the most commonly known ailment osteopaths help relieve is low back pain, there are many problems where osteopathy can be beneficial. These include joint and muscular pain, sciatica, repetitive strain injuries (RSI), rheumatic and arthritic pain, respiratory problems such as sinusitis and asthma, digestive problems such as IBS and acid reflux, aches and pains associated with pregnancy, headaches, tinnitus, jaw problems and sports injuries.

Pain is the body's mechanism for telling us something is wrong. However, the site of pain is not always the site of the underlying problem. In some instances, a trapped nerve in the neck or back can refer pain to the hand/arm or leg/foot. In other cases, changes in posture, gait or restrictions of movement in one part of the body cause over-compensations elsewhere, resulting in injury and pain from over-use. This is illustrated by the following two examples.

Many of us are affected by headaches, and whilst there are a number of rare serious causes, most head pain can be attributed to musculoskeletal or stress-related factors. For example, a strain of a joint in the neck can lead to painful "cervicogenic" headaches. The joint strain itself may be because it is being over-used to compensate for postural changes in the back, pelvis or even legs and feet. A sprained ankle or dropped foot arch can be sufficient to alter body posture such that slight asymmetrical curves are introduced into the back and neck resulting in abnormal joint loading and, ultimately, strains.

Tennis elbow affects numerous people, not just tennis players. It results from repetitive strain of muscles and tendons in the forearm. A range of factors can contribute to this condition, including adaptations of the hand/wrist and elbow to changes in posture affecting the shoulder and upper back. For example, many of us have stiff upper backs and rounded shoulders as a consequence of desk-based work and computer use. This reduces their range of movement leading to the arm and forearm muscles being compromised and making repetitive strains more likely.

The success of osteopathy is largely due to its holistic or "whole-body" approach to diagnosis and treatment. In the examples above, an osteopath would work to reduce pain and/or improve mobility at the site of the symptoms, but would also address the postural changes in other parts of the body contributing to and maintaining the injury. By taking such a whole-body approach, osteopaths facilitate healing and reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

Osteopathic healthcare is available from registered osteopaths Stephen Hudson and Caroline Sampson at:

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