

Osteopathy – A Natural Way to Reduce Pain & Improve Mobility

Osteopathy recognises that much of the pain and disability we suffer stems from abnormalities in our body's structure and function and osteopaths diagnose and treat over 6 million people, of all ages, every year for problems with muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints to help the body's natural healing ability.

The most common condition treated by osteopaths is low back pain and this accounts for over half of the patients attending Chippenham's own Ashfield Practice. There are many causes of back pain. However, our modern sedentary lifestyle, where many hours are spent at the computer or in front of the television, has a profound effect on the development of back pain. A recent survey showed that, in our area, almost half of all back pain is associated with prolonged sitting.

The trouble with back pain is that it can do more than just give you a pain in the back. It can create difficulties with walking, sitting, bending and lifting and can even lead to depression and incontinence. It can also be the cause of pain in the buttocks, groin or legs (commonly called sciatica), in the head, neck, shoulders and arms, and be one of the effects of hip, knee and foot problems.

Osteopathic treatment is often the most effective first line of attack in correcting problems caused by back pain. Speedy access to osteopathic care for acute patients often averts the possibility of conditions becoming chronic. Treatment involves gentle, manual techniques to ease pain, reduce swelling and improve mobility and does not involve the use of drugs or surgery. In fact, a trial by the UK Medical Research Council in 2004 compared treatment options for low back pain, and found that manual therapy such as osteopathy, added to GP care, is clinically effective and the most cost-efficient option.

The success of osteopathy is largely due to its holistic or "whole-body" approach to diagnosis and treatment. For example, prolonged sitting not only places huge postural strains on the low back, but also causes the upper back to become less flexible because it is constantly held in the same position – particularly when we are using a computer mouse, keyboard or phone. This reduced flexibility in the upper back means that it contributes less to our overall movement and so places additional demands on the low back when we are bending or twisting.

Osteopaths work to reduce pain and improve mobility at the sites that patients notice the most, but also address those postural changes in other parts of the body that contribute to 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 the Ashfield Practice, 22 Ashfield Road, Chippenham (Tel. 01249 659749; www.wiltsosteopaths.co.uk).