



OSTEOPATHIC INFORMATION SERVICE

OSTEOPATHY: Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a time when women are more aware of the workings of their body. It produces the largest postural change that a woman's body will undergo. For many years, osteopaths have used their skills to help relieve the aches and pains caused by weight and posture changes during and after pregnancy.

For many women pregnancy means having to cope with a whole range of symptoms from back pain to morning sickness. As the baby grows in the womb, its extra weight results in a changed centre of gravity and posture changes from week to week. This can lead to a variety of aches and pains. As breast weight increases, this also causes changes and pain may occur in the upper back and neck.

What is osteopathy?

- . Osteopathy recognises that much of the pain and disability we suffer stems from abnormalities in our body's structure and function.
- . Osteopaths diagnose and treat problems with muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints to help the body's natural healing ability.
- . Treatment involves gentle, manual techniques - easing pain, reducing swelling and improving mobility. Often, this involves manipulation which can result in an audible 'crack' which is simply the sound of gas bubbles popping in the fluid of the joints.
- . Osteopathy does not involve the use of drugs or surgery.

Why osteopathy?

Osteopathic treatment through pregnancy is a wonderfully gentle way of helping the body adapt to the changes which are taking place. The safety of mother and baby is the osteopath's first concern.

Advice from your osteopath can help you to change your posture and learn to use your body correctly through pregnancy. Osteopaths can also help to ease other side effects of pregnancy such as heartburn, indigestion, constipation and pain in the buttock, groin or leg (commonly called sciatica). Some patients, too, report reduced morning sickness

after osteopathic treatment.

Osteopathic treatment during pregnancy is not new. For many years, osteopaths have used their skills to help, employing a variety of gentle techniques to ease supporting muscles and ligaments.

Every pregnancy is 'special'. Osteopaths focus on the mother as a person and take account of her emotional state and other factors as well as her physical condition. Treatment may be supplemented by exercises and other forms of self help which the osteopath may prescribe for the mother to do at home.

An osteopath can advise on positions in labour to help prevent back problems later. Pain relief techniques can also be shown to the mother and her partner or friend so that they can help during labour.

After delivery it is advised that mother and child return for structural examination, advice and check ups and, if necessary, for treatment.

Remember

- . Osteopaths are skilled practitioners.
- . Osteopaths deal with pain every day.
- . Osteopaths can advise on good posture.
- . Osteopaths may help relieve back and leg pain in pregnancy.
- . Osteopaths can advise on pain relief during labour.

Return for advice and a check-up after delivery.

Useful tips

- Look after your back during pregnancy. Take particular care when lifting and carrying – especially lifting or carrying other children. Do not carry a small child on one arm for any length of time. Ask your osteopath for appropriate exercises.
- . If you stand for any length of time, keep your bottom 'tucked in' to reduce strain on the lower part of your spine.
- . When sitting, use a cushion for support and don't sit with your legs crossed. Avoid twisting movements. These may cause torsional strain within the pelvis.
- . Lying on your side in bed, place a pillow under 'the bump' to provide support and also put a pillow between your knees to prevent back strain.
- . If you prefer to lie on your back, place pillows beneath your knees to keep them bent.
- . Make sure all equipment (changing tables, pushchair, pram etc.) is at a comfortable height for you.

Visiting an osteopath

On your first visit, and before examination begins, the osteopath will discuss and

record your medical history in detail. You will then normally be asked to remove some of your clothing so that a series of observations and biomechanical assessments can be made.

The osteopath will then apply a highly developed sense of touch to identify points of weakness or excessive strain throughout the body. Further investigations may include an x-ray or blood test. This will allow a full diagnosis of the problem and will enable the osteopath to tailor a treatment plan to your needs.

Your osteopath should make you feel at ease and tell you what is happening throughout your consultation. You should ask questions if you have any concerns. If further medical treatment is needed the osteopath may contact your doctor, with your permission.

How much does osteopathy cost?

You do not need a referral from a GP to see an osteopath. The majority of osteopaths work in private practice, so you may choose to approach a practitioner directly and pay for treatment. Fees range from £25 to £50 and above for a single session, depending upon the location of the practice and experience of the osteopath. Typically between two and six treatment sessions are needed, though this varies according to the severity of the problem.

An increasing number of osteopaths work alongside GPs, so it may be possible for your doctor to refer you to an osteopath on the NHS. It may also be possible to claim for a course of osteopathy if you have private health insurance policy. Check with your insurance provider to confirm the available level of cover and to find out whether you require a referral from a GP or specialist. All insurance companies have help lines to explain your benefits and methods of claiming.

Osteopathy and patient protection

Patients consulting an osteopath have the same safeguards and rights as when consulting a doctor or dentist. Osteopathy is an established system of diagnosis and treatment, recognised by the British Medical Association as a distinct clinical discipline.

Under the Osteopaths Act of 1993, osteopathy was accorded statutory recognition, and the title "osteopath" protected by law. In the UK it is now a criminal offence to describe oneself as an osteopath unless registered with the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC).

The GOsC regulates, promotes and develops the profession, maintaining a Statutory Register of those entitled to practise. Practitioners on the Register meet the highest standards of safety and competency. They have provided proof of good health, good character and have professional indemnity insurance.

Osteopathic training is demanding and lengthy, and a recognised qualification is only available from osteopathic educational institutions accredited by the GOsC. Trainee osteopaths study anatomy, physiology, pathology, biomechanics and clinical methods

during a four or five year honours degree programme. Such wide-ranging medical training gives osteopaths the skills to diagnose conditions when osteopathic treatment is not advisable, and the patient must be referred to a GP for further investigation.

Osteopaths are committed to a programme of continuing professional development.

You can obtain details of an osteopath's registration by telephoning the GOsC on **020 7357 6655**.

Finding and osteopath near you

To find an osteopath near you, details are available in Thomson and Yellow Pages directories.

Alternatively contact the GOsC directly at: Osteopathy House 176 Tower Bridge Road London SE1 3LU Tel: 020 7357 6655 Email: info@osteopathy.org.uk
www.osteopathy.org.uk

Further information

This leaflet is one of a series of information leaflets for the public. Please contact us for copies of the following:

- . Osteopathy: An introduction to Osteopathy and the GOsC
- . Osteopathy: Arthritis
- . Osteopathy: Babies and children
- . Osteopathy: Back Pain
- . Osteopathy: Choosing a Bed
- . Osteopathy: Driving
- . Osteopathy: Pain Relief
- . Osteopathy: Sports
- . Osteopathy: Work Strain

For further information and lists of local practitioners please contact the Osteopathic Information Service, General Osteopathic Council, Osteopathy House, 176 Tower Bridge Road, London, SE1 3LU. Telephone number 0207 357 6655 or alternatively use our searchable database on www.osteopathy.org.uk