

How Osteopathy Can Help Your Baby.



Some of the challenges that baby's and parents face, such as feeding difficulties sleep disturbance, difficulty settling, reflux and an uneven head shape can be attributed to the trauma of moulding strains experienced during the birthing process.

Babies are subjected to enormous forces during the birthing process. The strong contractions of the uterus which push to expel the baby against the natural resistance of the birth canal cause the cranium to change shape which is described as molding. This allows the baby's head to fit and pass through the birth canal.

When there has been a long delivery, perhaps sixteen to twenty-four hours or there were complications such as the need for forceps, suction cap or an emergency cesarean. The molding processes undergo extra forces. These extra forces which are placed on the cranium can cause strains on the molding and lead to molding strains.

Molding strains are alterations to the shape and position of the bones of the cranium. They can occur both in utero, during the birthing process and after birth while the cranium is still ossifying. Molding strains occur within the membranous bone of the cranium and in the sutures which occupy the space between the cranial bones.

Most commonly it is the back of the head known as the occipital bone which connects the head to the spinal column that takes the brunt of the birthing forces during delivery. The occipital bone because of its prominence during birth and the fact that it is in four parts at birth tends to undergo a significant amount of molding strain.

The occipital bone has many vital structures that pass through it. Such as the spinal cord which passes through the foramen magnum. And the hypoglossal nerve that supplies the tongue and is responsible for the sucking motion. And the vagus nerve which supplies the upper digestive system and is responsible for acid levels and the movement of food through the stomach and small intestine. Excessive molding strains experienced by the occipital bone

can cause irritation to these nerve pathways and lead to changes in their normal function and cause problems with movement, feeding, and digestion.

Many babies are also born with odd shaped heads described as plagiocephaly as a result of moulding strains. In the first few days after delivery, the head can usually be seen to gradually lose the extreme moulded shape, as the baby suckles, cries and yawns. However, this unmolding process is often incomplete, especially if the birth has been difficult. As a result, the baby may have to live with some very uncomfortable stresses within its head and body. And potentially have a permanent uneven head shape.

Osteopathic practitioners who have a special interest in treating infants, babies and children have five years university study behind them and would have completed a significant amount of post graduate study in both cranial osteopathy and osteopathic pediatrics. Being federally registered practitioners osteopaths have to maintain a continuing level of practitioner proficiency which means ongoing study and peer review.

Osteopathic pediatrics incorporates a comprehensive clinical assessment of all new patients before a treatment commences. During the consultation a thorough history will be taken of the baby which covers the pregnancy, their movement, birth experience, sleeping and feeding habits. A physical examination is performed to assess the, alignment, muscle tone and reflex qualities of the baby. A parent will quite often hold the baby while the treatment is being performed to help maintain a comforting supportive environment for the baby.

Cranial osteopathy is very gentle and does not involve any sudden violent movements such as manipulation or the use of electrical or mechanical devices. The treatments are aimed at reducing the affects of molding strains and restoring the cranial shape back to normal. Gentle hand placements are used on the cranium, neck, torso and limbs to help assess and treat the baby.

Osteopath's hands are thinking feeling hands. The osteopath monitors what the available motion is and how the mechanisms of movement are working. Mechanisms of movement not only include musculoskeletal movement but also respiration, circulation and the free movement of the nervous system.

Treatments are directed at releasing strain within and between the bones of the cranium as well as restoring normal alignment and movement through the spinal column, pelvis and limbs. The osteopath feels for restrictions and asymmetries in the body which indicate that an area is in a state of physical strain. By gently unwinding and balancing the tension in the tissue with the surrounding areas this can lead to the release of the pathway of the vagus nerve which can reduce the affects of high acidity and reflux. Or the pathway of the hypoglossal nerve which can improve the movement of the tongue and improve feeding. And motion of the upper spine which helps the baby's movement development to continue as normal.

Most osteopathic treatments are between forty five minutes and half an hour long. Once the initial history, examination and treatment are completed a treatment plan will be created. Follow up appointments might be within a week or a fortnight. Normally the osteopath would expect to see changes within the first one to two treatments. Most osteopathic courses

of treatment are between four and six visits over a month to three month period. Osteopaths are integrated allied health practitioners and will work in with your GP and other health professionals for the wellbeing of your baby.

Dr Patrick Kuhn is a father of three and has been treating babies and children for the past ten years. He has completed post graduate study in osteopathic pediatrics and cranial osteopathy along with study in Anthroposophical medicine (Rudolph Steiner). Dr Kuhn lives and practices osteopathy at Emerald in the Dandenong Ranges Victoria.