

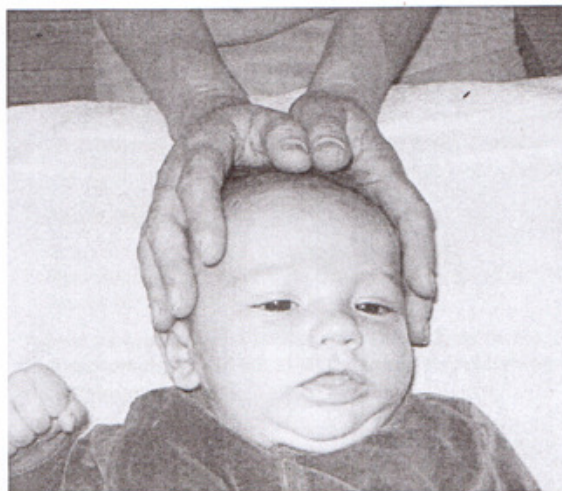
A Helping Hand

Sharon Winkler describes the range of benefits that osteopathy can bring to both mothers and their babies.

The birth process is an amazing and complex natural cascade of events. From pregnancy through to birth enormous physical and hormonal changes take place as the baby grows and prepares to be born. Osteopathy is a physical therapy which can be of great benefit to both mother and baby in a number of ways.

As the baby grows and takes up more space in the abdomen there is less space for it to move about, and it will find its own preferred position. The position of the baby in the womb can influence how much the baby is squeezed or squashed during pregnancy and labour. Sometimes the womb can get quite crowded if there is another sibling or two on the way, too!

The mother's posture has to adapt to these changes, aided by the softening of the ligaments from the action of the hormones. The body is very good at adapting but sometimes mothers may experience aches and pains during pregnancy; commonly backache, aching legs, hip pain and occasionally may experience strain at the front of the pelvis (termed SPD).



During labour, the uterus contracts forcefully to facilitate the descent of the baby into the pelvis. The baby's head and body is incredibly robust, being compressed and moulded to squeeze through the pelvis, aided by the fact that the softened ligaments allow the bones of the mother's pelvis to separate slightly for the delivery. On arrival, the baby may appear to have a distorted head shape from the process of moulding but this ordinarily resolves within 24 hours to a few days after birth and is perfectly normal.

Osteopathy and mothers

Osteopathy is suitable during pregnancy and after the baby is born. It is appropriate for easing aches and pains during pregnancy and ensuring that the mother's pelvis is structurally balanced, releasing old strains within the pelvis, thus helping towards as easy a labour as possible. After the birth, osteopathy can help the mother recover. Physical strains to the pelvis and lumbar spine can be addressed, assisting the mother to return to normal physical fitness; helping to prevent back pain from unresolved stresses and strains. Some mothers find osteopathy beneficial during the early weeks/months of infancy when lifting, carrying and feeding their fast-growing new baby.

Osteopathy and newborns

Osteopaths who work extensively with babies and children consider that some babies retain minor strain patterns attained from the womb and their journey into the big wide world. This may be visible to the naked eye by a minor asymmetry of head shape or a prefer-

SHARON WINKLER BSc (HONS) OST

REGISTERED OSTEOPATH

TREATING ANIMALS

BABIES/CHILDREN

AND ADULTS



Adults, Children & Babies
45 Chelwood Avenue
Hatfield, Herts
Tel: 01707 257880
www.sharonwinkler.co.uk

Dogs, Cats & Animals
Bishops Veterinary Surgery
10 Bishops Rise, Hatfield
Tel: 01707 272772
www.bishopsvet.co.uk

ence for persistently looking to one side. Often there may not be visible clues, but many osteopaths believe that some babies display behaviour patterns and symptoms when minor strains and possible discomfort persists. Such behaviours may be unexplained crying or irritability, or difficulties with feeding and digestion. Osteopaths are adept at identifying these strains and helping to resolve functional issues. The nervous and digestive systems of the newborn and young baby are very immature in the early weeks, but are able to cope more effectively as the baby grows older. Osteopaths help many babies during the early weeks.

Gently does it

The treatment of babies involves very gentle techniques. Osteopaths commonly, but not exclusively, use a technique known as *cranial osteopathy* which is a



subtle and gentle approach to treatment of the whole body, not just the head. This method of treatment gently releases and 'unlocks' patterns of strain which may be held in the body tissues and enables the

body's own ability to normalise itself. The treatment is also considered by osteopaths to have a calming influence by reducing overstimulation of the nervous and digestive systems.

Osteopaths see babies from as early as one day old! Mostly, parents bring their babies from a few days to several weeks old, and sometimes later at several months old. Many parents bring babies in for a routine check or because their baby is experiencing difficulties. Osteopaths find working with babies to be extremely rewarding and gratifying (and often entertaining!), privileged to be involved in the early life of such an amazing creation.

Useful tips for pregnancy

- Ensure you have a healthy well-balanced diet.
- Keep as active as possible throughout the pregnancy.
- Front crawl and breast stroke swimming is a great exercise in pregnancy.
- Pregnancy yoga classes help tone and stretch your body in preparation for birth.
- To encourage optimal positioning of the baby dur-

ing late pregnancy adopt postures in which your knees are lower than your hips, in particular sit upright and avoid slouching.

Useful tips for newborns

Tummy time! Do regularly place your baby on its tummy. Do this at a time when your baby is awake and you can watch. It is important for development, and gives the baby an opportunity to use different muscles. Some babies find this a comforting position.

Observe your baby and note if there is a preference for persistently looking to one side. If so encourage your baby to turn to the other side too. Sometimes changing the position of the Moses basket or cot helps.

Further reading

Osteopathy for Children, Elizabeth C Hayden DO
Understanding Infant Colic: An Osteopathic Perspective, Clive Hayden MSc, DO, MScC

Both publications are available from Churchdown Osteopaths in Gloucester, tel: 01452 714511. Email: churchdownosteopaths@btinternet.com.

Useful websites

www.homebirth.org.uk (Optimal foetal positioning)
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5128144.stm (Tummy time)

Sharon Winkler BSc (Hons) Ost is a Registered Osteopath practising in Hertfordshire.

£25 off Pregnancy Massage!

Buy 2 pregnancy massages with Lisa at Ginger and get the third half price!

Aching back, aching legs, Aching feet?

Fed up feeling slow and heavy?

A massage will ease those aches and pains and calm a worried mind too!



Chill out with a treatment tailored to meet your individual needs, such as swollen ankles, lower back aches, or shoulder and neck tension.

Connect with your baby and adjust to your changing body and emotions.

Lisa Adams

at

Ginger Natural Health

www.gingernaturalhealth.co.uk

01727 869 929