

Osteopathy and babies

The birth of a child is a miraculous time, however many babies often suffer from colic, feeding difficulties and problems sleeping. This is obviously distressing for both the baby and the parents. This leads to the question: why does this occur?

The average diameter of the female pelvis is 11 centimetres. The average size of a baby's head is 10 centimetres. This is why the baby must make several movements and rotations so that it can be born. The baby's skull is malleable so that the process can take place. However if the baby gets stuck which leads to interventions such as ventouse (vacuum extraction) or forceps delivery or increased compression on the babies neck and skull which can lead to distortions and increase in tension in the tissues of the neck and base of the skull. These tensions and distortions often irritate the nerves around the base of the skull and neck especially the vagus nerve and diaphragm. This can cause babies to have colic and suffer from sickness and reflux. "Fussy" babies or babies that just cry and cry are often after they have had significant compression to the skull which causes the membranes that surround the brain to be tight. This is why their sleep is often affected as their nerves are irritable and their brains cannot cycle into deeper sleep. They cry and scream to release the tissue tension. The osteopath can use gentle treatment to help the baby to recover from these distortions. The other area most babies have is a sore back; this is often due to the rotations that occur through the spine so that the shoulder can be delivered. This is why many babies hate being put on their backs.

What about caesarean section deliveries? If the caesarean section is an emergency one the baby is often stuck and the tissues therefore have undergone significant compression and then traction. If there has been a planned c-section the baby is often full of mucous as one function of the birth process is with the compression through the uterus the mucous in the babies lungs and stomach is drained. This mucous contributes to sick babies. The other function of the compression of birth is the brain has a fluid within the brain called cerebro-spinal fluid. This circulates through the brain down the spinal cord. The birth process kick starts the circulation of this fluid. This is often sluggish in caesarean section babies, which again affects their sleep patterns and ability to relax.

One of the fundamental principles of osteopathy is that the body is a self-healing unit. The babies bodies will always try to release the tensions and strains occurred during birth. Sometimes this takes a significant time or the body can only release to a certain point. This is where the osteopath can maximise the babies potential and healing process.

Osteopathy and children

Osteopathic treatment can help children in many ways. Problems related to a delay in development such as speech difficulties, co-ordination and educational problems. Osteopathy can also help "growing pains" that are not explained through medical diagnosis. Recurrent glue ear and sinus problems can be due to past traumatic injuries associated with a normal childhood. Osteopathy concentrates on helping the child's developing body as well as using gentle treatment to help improve the small movements that occur in the child's skull.

Children are also picking up strains and injuries to their bodies and skulls. This can cause changes in sleep patterns, behaviour, sticky eyes, contribute to ear infections, injuries to their pelvis can affect bladder function and other joint pains. The other area, which is underestimated, is post fracture healing. Bones are malleable not the fixed dry things we picture from biology lessons. Therefore before they break they bend; the tissues therefore even after they have healed are left with a bend, a memory of the injury. This can cause muscles and ligaments to be placed under greater tension causing pain and longer term strain patterns. The osteopath can release these tensions within the bone.