

Osteopathy

- ◆ Osteopathy focuses on the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal disorders and the effects of these conditions on patient's general health.
- ◆ Osteopathy is a system of healing that deals with the structure of the body - the joints, ligaments, tendons, muscles and general connective tissues, and their relationship with one another.
- ◆ Osteopathy is based on the principle that the body has an intrinsic ability to heal, and osteopathic care focuses on strengthening the musculoskeletal systems to treat existing conditions and to prevent illness.

How is this therapy given - what happens during treatment?

Osteopaths are qualified to offer a differential diagnosis towards the causes of back problems and use many of the diagnostic procedures involved in conventional medical assessment and diagnosis. Osteopaths may decide to refer you elsewhere if appropriate.

In a first consultation, an osteopath will compile a full case history of the patient's symptoms, as well as information about their lifestyle and diet.

Osteopaths are trained to examine areas of the body using a highly developed sense of touch, called palpation, to determine conditions and identify the body's points of weakness or excessive strain. The osteopath may also observe the patient doing some simple movements to facilitate diagnosis.

The patient will usually be asked to remove some of their clothing near the area of the body to be examined. A gown or a towel, and a screen, will be provided.

The osteopath will discuss with the patient the most appropriate treatment plan, estimating the likely number of sessions needed to treat the patient's condition effectively. If the condition is unlikely to respond to osteopathic treatment, the patient will be advised on how to seek further care. In general, the first treatment lasts about 45 minutes, and subsequent treatments around half an hour. Osteopathy is a 'package' of care that includes skilled mobilising and manipulative techniques, reinforced by guidance on diet and exercise.

What is the evidence?

Clinical research evidence suggests that osteopathy may be effective in helping low back pain that started fairly recently (less than three months ago).

A survey of Consumer Association members by 'Which' magazine showed that three-quarters (74%) of those who had turned to osteopathy for help with back pain found that it had greatly improved their problem. A study of BackCare members, most of whom have back pain of long standing, revealed that a quarter (25%) found that treatment had had a long-term beneficial effect on their pain and a further 45% that it had helped in the short-term.

What back conditions is it most likely to help?

Low back pain of fairly recent origin i.e. around six weeks

What back conditions is it least likely to help?

Chronic back pain of long standing with associated psychological problems.

What back conditions should not be treated with this therapy?

Pain caused by spinal tumours or osteoporosis and other known medical problems presenting as backache.

Funding

In some areas funding is available through the NHS, ask your G.P. about this.

Regulator

The General Osteopathic Council
Osteopathy House,
176 Tower Bridge Road, London, SE1 3LU
Telephone: 020 7357 6655
Website: www.osteopathy.org.uk

Qualifications

Osteopathy is a statutory self-regulated profession and it is an offence for anyone to describe themselves as an osteopath and practise as such, unless registered with the General Osteopathic Council. Training takes between three and five years. Osteopaths use the letters DO or BSc(hons)(Os.) or BSc(Ost.) after their name.

Relevant Information

- ◆ BackCare factsheets - the Difference between Osteopathy and Chiropractic; Chiropractic
- ◆ BackCare booklets - Managing Back Pain; Basic Back Care
- ◆ Other Publications – “Treating Your Back & Neck Pain for Dummies” by Burn, Sinel & Deardorff
living with Back Pain” by Parker & Main (both available from BackCare)