



Osteopathy

What do they do?

Osteopathy is primarily a 'hands-on' form of therapy. The principle is to treat muscles and associated soft tissues that have become tight or gone into 'spasm'.

When muscles are in spasm, then they are not able to function normally. This can limit the movements of large joints like the hip or the shoulder. If the spasm occurs in muscles around the spine, then all movement can be restricted and painful. This will also have a negative effect on your posture and then the spasm and pain can move to other areas of the spine.

In severe cases, trying to use the affected muscles can result in increased pain. When you stop moving / exercising, then the muscles react by going into spasm once more. This cycle repeats itself as the muscles 'learn' to react in this unhelpful way. The osteopath uses manual therapy to relieve muscle spasm and improve blood flow. Gently stretching the muscles past the point of reactivity, stops them responding by tightening up.

Often the benefits can be immediate, but a course of treatment is often required to unravel the problem, particularly if it has been present for a long time.

The osteopath will give you advice on what to do at home to gain further benefit from the treatment. They may give you a stretch and gentle exercise programme. You should continue the programme once the pain is a dim distant memory. If you do this as a preventative regime, your chance of having further episodes of pain is reduced and should they occur be much less severe and shorter lived.

Osteopaths are very much involved in the treatment of mechanical pain in particular. Usually they will make an assessment of the problem by taking a history of the problem, for example:

- How did it start?
- What did you do?
- Where is the pain?
- What makes it worse?

Then they will examine you to look for:

- Muscle spasm
- Muscle weakness
- Abnormal movement patterns

- Asymmetry in movement
- Joint instability
- Poor posture

Whilst you are with the therapist they may employ techniques to bring immediate relief:

- Acupuncture
- Soft tissue release
- Laser therapy
- Hands-on manipulation or massage

They may advise on:

- Ergonomics – particularly when at your computer either at home or at work
- Heat and cold applications to help stop further muscle spasm
- Progressing to or back to sporting activity in a graduated fashion

All osteopaths will place different emphasis on the different components of your treatment. No therapist can always hit the correct package for an individual patient every time. A treatment package needs to be reviewed over the weeks of treatment eliminating exercises that aggravate the problem and substituting others. Any exercises should start with simple options and more challenging and complex manoeuvres added as strength and confidence grows.

Exercise is NOT a situation where there is 'No pain no Gain'. Some muscle soreness is to be expected after exercise especially to start with. You may be using some muscles for the first time in a long time and this will settle with time. If however treatment is persistently provoking the fundamental pain problem, then something is not right and a medical review may then be appropriate.

Pain-killing medications are not a substitute for osteopathic treatment. The rationale for pain-killers is as a short term measure to enable you to develop strength and flexibility without the pain preventing you from getting started.