About Osteopathy

What Is Osteopathy?
Osteopathy is a form of manual medicine that detects and treats damaged parts of the body such as muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints. There are a number of types of osteopathic treatment, from the very gentle cranial techniques through to the more physical manipulative techniques.

An American doctor, Andrew Taylor Still, initially founded osteopathy in the United States in the late 1800’s. Since then osteopathic schools have been established worldwide.

To become an osteopath involves between 4 and 7 years of full-time study, depending on which country you train in. In most countries osteopaths are required to continue to engage in post-graduate development to maintain their registration.

What Is Cranial Osteopathy?
Cranial osteopathy is a gentle, manual form of osteopathic treatment that encourages the release of stresses and tensions throughout the body, including the head. Cranial osteopathic treatment has, over the years become associated with the treatment of babies and children however it may be used for a wide range of conditions for people of all ages.

Cranial Osteopathic Treatment of Babies and Children
Cranial osteopathy may be of assistance in relieving a number of the symptoms of neuro-musculoskeletal dysfunction that babies and children may experience.

Babies and children may experience a number of problems before, during, and after birth leaving the child with uncomfortable stresses within its head and body. These stresses can lead to difficulties with sucking and effective latching-on, irritability, Colic, wind, disturbed sleep patterns, and excessive crying. They may also favor turning their head to one side, dislike laying on their front, and have difficulty learning to roll over.

As toddlers become more active neuro-musculoskeletal dysfunction may start to create difficulties with mobility, such as unusual crawling techniques, or delayed physical milestones. It can also create disturbed sleep patterns, head banging or pulling at the hair, speech difficulties, and irritability.

When children get older and become increasingly physical they are more likely to injure themselves. Most of these injuries are minor and do not require any treatment. However some injuries are more severe and may compromise how well the child’s body is functioning. It is important to ensure that the neuro-musculoskeletal system is functioning to its full ability given the changes that occur whilst the body is growing from infancy to adulthood.

Osteopaths regularly treat the following childhood problems, chronic coughs and colds, ear infections, delayed progression through the childhood milestones, a range of orthopedic conditions, speech difficulties, a wide range of learning difficulties, temperamental/behavioral problems, poor sleep patterns, and irritability. We also see
a wide range of problems associated with a variety of syndromes and congenital issues that children may present with.
Osteopathic treatment can be useful in assessing, and treating the body, young or old. Cranial osteopathic treatment is very gentle, painless, and quite relaxing. The majority of patients find treatment enjoyable.
Osteopaths that treat babies and children will often have a range of toys and books to keep the child amused whilst the treatment is taking place.

Osteopathic Treatment During Pregnancy and Childbirth

The Changes that a woman’s body undergoes in pregnancy and childbirth are vast. These changes occur over a relatively short period of time, and involve all aspects of the woman’s body. Osteopathic treatment during the pregnancy and after the birth can help the woman’s body to adjust to these changes and ensure the process is as comfortable as possible.
Some Benefits of Osteopathic Treatment are;
Easing some of the physical discomforts of pregnancy.
Preparing for the demands of labour.
Helping the mother to recover after birth.

Pregnancy related problems that may benefit from Osteopathic Treatment

Aches and Pains, i.e. low back pain, sciatica, mid back pain, headaches, pelvic pain, carpal tunnel syndrome
Research has found that 50% of pregnant women will suffer from back and or pelvic pain. A lot of women believe that they will have to put up with this as it is because they are pregnant and until they have the baby it cant be helped. This is not the case, in fact gentle Osteopathic treatment in pregnancy can help with most of these symptoms, making the pregnancy more enjoyable for the woman. The woman’s body changes dramatically to accommodate the growing uterus and this involves substantial changes to her posture. At the same time the hormone Relaxin is causing Her ligaments to soften, reducing the amount of support they are providing to the skeletal system. Relaxin has the biggest effect on the low back and pelvic ligaments. Whilst this is fantastic for the labour it can cause instability in these areas before labour. Women often feel that their pelvic is very ‘loose’ or ‘like jelly’. Postural changes can cause backache, neck pain, headaches, and arm and leg pain, all of which can cause undue fatigue. Osteopathic treatment can help the body adapt to the extra requirements and demands made on the woman’s body during pregnancy and after birth.
If the woman has existing back or pelvic problems, or problems from past accidents or trauma, it may be more difficult for her body to accommodate these changes, and she may suffer more discomfort as a result. Past injuries and current problems can often still be helped.
Heart Burn
As the uterus expands into the abdominal cavity, it stretches and squashes the diaphragm contributing to heartburn. Osteopathic treatment can often improve the bodies’ function in this area and improve heartburn.

Breathing Difficulties
Postural changes through the lower ribs and spine can hinder the function of the diaphragm and make breathing difficult. Osteopathic treatment to improve function of the whole rib cage and this can improve the woman’s breathing.

Varicose Veins and Haemorrhoids
Tension within the pelvic and abdominal area can increase congestion and pressure in the veins in the vulval region, pelvic area and legs. Osteopathic treatment to improve function in these areas is helpful in the prevention and management of these conditions.

Lower Rib Cage Pain
It is common for women to suffer from pain in the front or back of their rib cage as the pregnancy progresses. As the uterus gets bigger the rib cage gets wider and is required to stretch to make more room for the baby. Osteopathic treatment to ease this process will often make it a lot more comfortable for the women if she has been experiencing pain.

Birth and the Babies Position
As labour is likely to be more difficult if the baby is not positioned correctly, it is worth trying to help them to move into an optimal position. The baby generally lies in a head down position and facing backward. This puts the baby in the most advantageous position for passing through the birth canal during labour.
As the baby grows and takes up more space within the abdomen there is less space for them to move about, and they will find their own preferred position. The mother’s posture has to adapt to accommodate the position of the baby, and if this conflicts with her own postural needs it may cause undue aches and pains.
An important part of preparation for childbirth is to ensure that the mother’s pelvis is functioning well and able to allow the passage of the baby down the birth canal. Trauma to the pelvic bones, coccyx or sacrum at any time in a mother’s life can leave increased tension in muscles and strains within the ligaments and bones of the pelvis. This can limit the ability of these structures to accommodate the labour. Osteopathic treatment is extremely effective at improving low back and pelvic function, thus giving the best chance of an easy and uncomplicated labour. In most cases osteopathic treatment to ensure that the pelvis and uterus are correctly balanced and aligned can help with discomforts caused by the baby’s position, and can often encourage the baby lie in an optimal position.

Treatment after Birth
Birth can be traumatic for both mother and baby, and osteopathy is effective at helping both to recover.
**Mother**
The mother’s pelvis and back is vulnerable to strains from the forces involved in labour, particularly after a difficult delivery. Treatment after all labours, but especially difficult labours, will help the mother’s body during the recovery process. As the mother will now be caring for her baby and this involves hard work for her back it is essential that any problems are dealt with. The mother should be able to enjoy her new baby without unnecessary lingering back problems.

**Baby**
The baby can suffer long-lasting effects from their engagement position and moulding process during birth, and an osteopathic check up is recommended. Cranial Osteopathic treatment for young babies can help with a number of problems, such as colic, feeding problems, irritability, poor sleep patterns, preference to sleep looking to one side, constipation, and as the child grows difficulties with developmental milestones.

**Is Osteopathy safe during Pregnancy?**
Osteopaths are highly skilled and undergo a minimum of 4 years training. Gentle osteopathic techniques are perfectly safe at all stages of pregnancy. The cranial osteopathic approach is a particularly gentle form of Osteopathic treatment and commonly used during pregnancy and for both mother and child after delivery.

**Osteopathy in New Zealand**
In New Zealand Osteopaths are regulated by the Osteopathic Council of New Zealand (OCNZ) created under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act. It is illegal to use the term “Osteopath” in NZ without holding registration with the OCNZ. That registration is only granted to osteopathic practitioners who obtain proper tertiary qualifications and meet the stringent continuing education requirements of the OCNZ.

ACC and all NZ private health care insurers cover Osteopathic treatment. Referral to an Osteopath for treatment under ACC is not required.

**Canterbury Osteopaths**
Sarah Wisson can be found at the following clinics;

**Helios Medical Centre**
275 Fifield Trc, St Martins, Christchurch 2
Phone 03 332 5702. Fax 03 377 5612

**Southside Health**
10F Newnham Street, Rangiora
Phone 03 313 5252

**Active Health**
545 Manchester Street, St Albans. Christchurch
Phone 03 383 6290