



Osteopathy: Arthritis

Osteopaths spend a large amount of their time dealing with the pain and suffering caused by arthritis. Many people mistakenly assume that arthritis is untreatable and that they must learn to live with their symptoms.

In many cases, osteopaths are able to help considerably. Pain relief and lifestyle management improve the quality of life for arthritis sufferers.

What is arthritis?

Broadly, arthritis may be divided into two types – degenerative and inflammatory. Degenerative or OSTEOARTHRITIS is the commonest form, sometimes called 'wear and tear' and is usually localised to a specific site such as the hips, knees or spine. Its classic features of pain, stiffness and restricted mobility may often be eased and improved with skilled osteopathic treatment.

Inflammatory arthritis such as RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS is generally a systemic disease affecting not just joints but the whole body. Like osteoarthritis it produces severe pain, stiffness and often deformity. Osteopathy may be helpful in addition to medication.

Arthritis

You don't necessarily have to live with any of these:

- Neck Pain
- Low back pain
- Hip Pain
- Early morning stiffness
- Pain
- Swelling
- Lack of mobility

Remember

- Osteopaths treat patients with arthritis every day.
- You may not have to put up with your pain.
- Osteopaths can advise on good posture.
- Osteopaths can help you with treatment and advise on self help.
- Osteopaths are highly skilled practitioners.

Why osteopathy?

Osteopathic treatment can do a great deal to reduce pain, ease swelling and improve mobility and range of joint movement.

There are many popular misconceptions about arthritis. For example: 'Degenerative change on x-rays means that nothing can be done. Pain killers or anti-inflammatories are the only answer'. In fact, joint wear and tear is normal after the age of 35 and does not necessarily mean you will have any symptoms. The osteopath may well require x-rays, blood tests or even MRI scans to assess the extent of your condition. Treatment is not painful and often, symptom relief begins immediately.

Treatment

Treatment is aimed at improving mobility and reducing inflammation by using gentle, manual osteopathic techniques on joints, muscles and ligaments. You will be given positive advice related to your lifestyle about how you use your body.

Age is no barrier to osteopathy since each patient is considered individually and treatment is gentle. You may also be given advice about your diet, which in some people may be a factor in their arthritis. Exercises to do at home may also be prescribed to improve joint function and to reduce muscle spasm. Exercise in warm water or salt baths may also be recommended.

Osteopathy is not a cure-all and there are situations when surgery may be necessary – such as a hip replacement when you will be referred to a specialist via your GP. However, osteopathy can help with rehabilitation after surgery.

Visiting an osteopath

On your first visit, and before examination begins, the osteopath will discuss and record your medical history in detail. You will then normally be asked to remove some of your clothing so that a series of observations and biomechanical assessments can be made.

The osteopath will then apply a highly developed sense of touch to identify points of weakness or excessive strain throughout the body. Further investigations may include an x-ray or blood test. This will allow a full diagnosis of the problem and will enable the osteopath to tailor a treatment plan to your needs.

Your osteopath should make you feel at ease and tell you what is happening throughout your consultation. You should ask questions if you have any concerns. If further medical treatment is needed the osteopath may contact your doctor, with your permission.

How much does osteopathy cost?

You do not need a referral from a GP to see an osteopath. The majority of osteopaths work in private practice so you may choose to approach a practitioner directly and pay for treatment. Fees range from £25 to £50 and above for a single session, depending upon the location of the practice and experience of the osteopath. Typically between two and six treatment sessions are needed, though this varies according to the severity of the problem.

An increasing number of osteopaths work alongside GPs, so it may be possible for your doctor to refer you to an osteopath on the NHS. It may also be possible to claim for a course of osteopathy if you have private health insurance policy. Check with your insurance provider to confirm the available level of cover and to find out whether you require a referral from a GP or specialist. All insurance companies have help lines to explain your benefits and methods of claiming.

Osteopathy and patient protection

Patients consulting an osteopath have the same safeguards and rights as when consulting a doctor or dentist. Osteopathy is an established system of diagnosis and treatment, recognised by the British Medical Association as a distinct clinical discipline.

Under the Osteopaths Act of 1993, osteopathy was accorded statutory recognition, and the title "osteopath" protected by law. In the UK it is now a criminal offence to describe oneself as an osteopath unless registered with the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC).

The GOsC regulates, promotes and develops the profession, maintaining a Statutory Register of those entitled to practise. Practitioners on the Register meet the highest standards of safety and competency. They have provided proof of good health, good character and have professional indemnity insurance.

Osteopathic training is demanding and lengthy, and a recognised qualification is only available from osteopathic educational institutions accredited by the GOsC. Trainee osteopaths study anatomy, physiology, pathology, biomechanics and clinical methods during a four or five year honours degree programme. Such wide-ranging medical training gives osteopaths the skills to diagnose conditions when osteopathic treatment is not advisable and the patient must be referred to a GP for further investigation.

Osteopaths are committed to a programme of continuing professional development.

You can obtain details of an osteopath's registration by telephoning the GOsC on **020 7357 6655**.

Finding an osteopath near you

To find an osteopath near you details are available in Thomson and Yellow Pages directories.

Alternatively contact the GOsC directly at:

Osteopathy House
176 Tower Bridge Road
London SE1 3LU
Tel: 020 7357 6655
Email: info@osteopathy.org.uk
www.osteopathy.org.uk

Further information

This leaflet is one of a series of information leaflets for the public. Please contact us for copies of the following:

- Osteopathy: An introduction to Osteopathy and the GOsC
- Osteopathy: Babies and children
- Osteopathy: Back Pain
- Osteopathy: Choosing a Bed and choosing a bed
- Osteopathy: Driving
- Osteopathy: Pain Relief
- Osteopathy: Pregnancy
- Osteopathy: Sports
- Osteopathy: Work Strain

For further information and lists of local practitioners please contact the Osteopathic Information Service, General Osteopathic Council, Osteopathy House, 176 Tower Bridge Road, London, SE1 3LU. Telephone number 0207 357 6655 or alternatively use our searchable database on www.osteopathy.org.uk