



# SHE'S GOT *the touch*



In our last issue, osteopath Sarah-Jane Attias looked at how osteopathy can help women during pregnancy. In this article, Sarah-Jane explains how it can treat your brand new baby.



**It is well documented that osteopathy offers a unique, successful and effective way of resolving many of the issues that present, both to your newborn and to you, in your new role as a mum. In fact, at Living Osteopathy almost half our patients are mums, babies and toddlers. It helps to remember that you and your baby are a unit – while it is important to create the best environment possible for baby, it is also vital to assist and support mothers to physically restore, rest and truly enjoy motherhood.**

All osteopaths have completed an Honours or Masters degree course, between four and seven years of full-time study in anatomy, neuroanatomy, physiology and embryology. From here, most osteopaths have furthered their study in a particular area of interest, for example paediatrics – the study of the infant. Here's a sweet fact: 'paediatrics' is a Greek word meaning 'healer of children'. Basically, osteopaths are trained to diagnose, give gentle hands-on treatment and offer sound medical advice and techniques to smooth the path ahead for both mother and child.

#### questions around cranial

Cranial osteopathy has a very strong bias towards the treatment of babies, children and the elderly, due to the gentle nature of the cranial approach. The cranial technique involves the osteo feeling a subtle body rhythm, known as the involuntary motion. IVM refers to the collective rhythm of all the cyclic movements of body functions. While the IVM can be felt through the whole body, the osteopath will often focus on the head, as the position and movement of the bones of the skull influence the IVM. Osteopaths use IVM to detect areas where the body tissues move well or are 'stuck'. They can then focus treatment on the 'stuck spots' with small gentle movements to restore optimal balance and function to the tissues.

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When you take your baby to an osteopath, the treatment your baby will receive will include cranial and other gentle movement and massage-type techniques. Not a lot of movement is used, in fact it might not even appear that your osteopath is doing anything! This is because the treatment is so gentle.

Negative reactions to treatment are uncommon – in fact, most babies are much calmer following treatment and sleep very well. Some babies may be a little out of sorts for 24 to 48 hours, a temporary situation depending on the physical changes their body is assimilating.

#### easing the pressure

By nature, birth is a very physical process. There is a lot of pressure at play! Your uterus is a strong muscular bag, and when it's time to release your baby, the process is forceful. The 'wringing' and pushing action uses pressure (via your baby's head) to help trigger the dilation of your cervix. Birth strain, specifically on a baby's head and neck, has potential to compress and irritate the delicate nerves in the upper neck. These nerves communicate with the stomach,



intestines, skin, muscles and joints of the head and neck, potentially contributing to issues such as colic or constipation, headaches and neck pain. Restricted neck movement in a baby can also lead to other issues, including feeding problems and flat spots on the head.

A difficult presentation, causing a prolonged birth, means sustained pressure on baby. On the other hand, a quick birth can mean there is little time to accommodate for the forces. In either case, pressure can over-stimulate the nervous system, adding to the stress of birth. All this to say birth strain is a valid concern and contributor to a baby's wellbeing.

At this stage, your baby's body is mainly cartilage (not hardened bone), including the 'bony' plates of the skull. Skull plates are pliable and slide over each other, thus allowing baby to be flexible on their journey down a narrow birth canal and out through the cervix.

During birth, in a number of cases, babies need a helping hand in the form of forceps, ventouse or Caesarian section, meaning baby is scooped, sucked or cut out. Needless to say, these interventions can put additional and dramatic pressure on baby's delicate structure.

First breath, first cry, first suckle – all these actions help the skull bones to return to their rightful position over the first few days following birth. Sometimes this does not happen completely though and osteopathic treatment can help here. Osteopaths are trained to detect subtle asymmetrical differences from one side of a head to another, such as an ear higher than the other, flattened or pointy heads, bruising on top of the head or over an eye. Gentle realignments can be made by your osteopath.

#### how can we help?

I'm often asked when parents should seek treatment for their babies. Short answer: the sooner the better. With treatment, we are able to encourage a faster resolution to your baby's birthing influences.

Osteopaths can also help with a wide range of other common complaints relating to babies. Babies rarely cry for no reason. If baby is crying and hard to settle, there is a great probability that the reason for their tears fits into one of three broad categories:

colic, reflux or an elevated nervous system. Crying can be distressing for all family members, including other siblings who are learning to love and 'tolerate' the new arrival. For mothers especially, prolonged crying can lead to sleep deprivation, feelings of self-doubt or blame – all of which have been implicated as triggers of postnatal depression. This is why a holistic approach to care for the whole family is of vital importance. Here are the most common reasons parents seek osteopathic treatment:

**the symptom – colic:** Pediatricians often use the 'rule of three' to diagnose colic: A baby who cries for three or more hours per day, at least three times per week, within a three month period. Colic is caused by an immature digestive and nervous system, air intake from feeding and crying, gas producing foods, over-stimulation, acid reflux and/or allergic reactions which create symptoms of trapped stomach and intestinal wind, leading to abdominal bloating and acute gastric and intestinal pains. Basically, it's painful for baby and distressing for parents.

**the treatment:** Cranial osteopathy is very good at calming the over-stimulated nervous system. The hands-on treatment directly on baby's diaphragm results in relaxed breathing, and secondly, we ease the tension around the gut valve. This helps to relax baby's lower intestine, offering instant relief and increasing the space in baby's developing abdomen.

We also review a good feeding plan, including Mum's diet. I do like to show patients how to massage baby's tummy; a tried and true remedy I use in clinic is Absolute Essential Baby Tummy Blend (a soothing peppermint and coriander blend), alongside an oral dose of Colic Calm (a homeopathic dose of botanicals).

**the symptom – reflux:** There are different levels of reflux. The symptoms include frequent vomiting, unless it's silent reflux whereby babies tend to make swallowing motions often when crying. The sleep patterns of reflux babies are difficult and irregular. Most manage only 20-30 minutes of sleep before waking up and crying again. Due to the irritation of the valve (part of the diaphragm) between the oesophagus (food pipe) and stomach, it leads to discomfort which manifests in baby arching and not wanting to sleep on their back.

**the treatment:** I always review the mother's diet and suggest an exclusion diet, as there may be a lactose (sugars in milk) intolerance and/or sensitivity to certain foods. From the amine food group (banana, cocoa, kiwi fruit, avocado for example) to acid foods like tomatoes – the list of potential offenders is long! It is often harder to get wind up with reflux, which only leads to further discomfort and irritability and often colic is in the background.

Osteopathy can help to calm the nervous system and increase the potential space within the abdomen, release the tension around the diaphragm and assist in the function of the bowel.

If the symptoms are more severe, prescribed medication will help you and your baby to move through this period of discomfort. Osteopathy is effective alongside medication.

**the symptom – lack of sleep:** Babies have sleep cycles of 45 minutes and can sleep up to 18 hours in 24. While some babies will fall asleep easily, others need to learn how to go to sleep. As parents, understanding how to observe the tired signs of flailing arms, yawning and making fists is helpful, so as to prevent babies from getting over-tired. Also, not necessarily picking baby up the minute they wake is important, as there is a possibility that baby may drop back to sleep.

With some babies, I have found that they either have an over-stimulated nervous system, eg startle easily, or an under-stimulated

nervous system, eg baby sleeps a lot and always seems a little dopey.

**the treatment:** In both cases, osteo treatment helps to correct the balance of baby's nervous system and calm baby.



**the symptom –**

**constipation:** It is normal for newborns to have several bowel movements a day and, in the process, become red-faced with their straining and pushing. As long as the motions are soft, there is no constipation. However, if a baby only passes a motion every seven to ten days, this is still considered normal, but not desirable.

**the treatment:** Gentle hands-on treatment can rebalance and release any tension around baby's pelvic floor and lower abdomen. Osteopathic treatment can also ensure good spinal articulation, which affects the nerve supply to the muscles that control the tone around the contents of the abdomen and ensure the uninterrupted stimulation to the bowel and its movement to encourage defecation.

**the symptom – chronic middle ear infections or glue ear:**

Typically, the eustachian tube in a young baby lies horizontal, making it less likely to drain and thus prone to infection. As your baby's face develops, ears lift and the jaw begins to fill out and drop away. This in turn changes the angle and allows fluids to drain 'downhill' more effectively.

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**the treatment:** Osteopathy helps to encourage the drainage of the middle ear via the eustachian tube, freeing up any restriction there. We also discuss food sensitivities that could be causing ear health issues.

**the symptom – breast feeding problems:** For new mums, this can be the most incredible time of connection with your baby. As such, it can be very challenging if baby is not latching well or causing mum pain by over-clamping on the nipple.

**the treatment:** I have several lactation consultants who refer babies to me. First I check for a tongue/lip tie. Next we treat baby's mouth; tongue, jaw, roof of mouth and swallowing. I often ask mothers to feed their baby during my treatment, as this ensures the treatment is more functional – you can actually feel how your baby is finding it easier to suckle.

Over my 25 years of osteopathic experience, I have attended many courses and seminars with inspirational and learned teachers who have a passion and a joy for sharing their knowledge in the treatment of babies and children. I have always considered it an honour to be part of the health team of a developing family. ●

**Sarah-Jane Attias BSc (Hons) Ost. London MONZ is one of the country's most respected practitioners with 25 years' experience. She believes in providing an integrated treatment approach for the whole family. Sarah-Jane embodies her holistic beliefs in her daily activities. She enjoys yoga, Pilates, swimming, tramping and cycling, a nutrient-rich diet and the odd glass of red wine to powerhouse her way through life.**



"If you have received treatment from myself or my associates during your pregnancy, we offer a free Wellness Check for your newborn. Be sure to book yours in!"