



OSTEOPATHY: Back Pain

Lower back pain has reached epidemic proportions in the western world. Research shows that 60% of the UK's population will suffer from it at some stage during their lives.

Back pain responds well to osteopathic treatment – reducing pain and restoring mobility and quality of life.

What is Osteopathy?

- Osteopathy recognises that much of the pain and disability we suffer stems from abnormalities in our body's structure and function.
- Osteopaths diagnose and treat problems with muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints to help the body's natural healing ability.
- Treatment involves gentle, manual techniques – easing pain, reducing swelling and improving mobility. Often, this involves manipulation which can result in an audible 'crack' which is simply the sound of gas bubbles popping in the fluid of the joints.
- Osteopathy does not involve the use of drugs or surgery.

The scourge of back pain

- Lower back pain now affects two-thirds of the adult population of the UK; it is the nation's leading cause of disability.
- Four out of five people will suffer back pain lasting more than a day at some point in their lives.
- Over £480 million a year is spent on services used by sufferers of back pain, including 14 million GP consultations, seven million therapy sessions and 800,000 hospital beds.
- Back pain is very common in children. Around 50% of children in Europe experience back pain at some time.
- Back problems and repetitive strain injuries cost British industry £5 billion each year.
- Doctors write 55 million prescriptions for painkillers each year.

Back pain – causes and effects

The trouble with back pain is that it can do more than just give you a pain in the back. It can create difficulties with walking, sitting, bending and lifting and can even lead to depression and incontinence. It can also be the cause of pain in the buttocks, groin or legs (commonly called sciatica), in the head, neck, shoulders and arms. It can also be one of the effects of hip, knee and foot problems.

Back pain can result from bad posture, a sudden jerky movement, a lumpy mattress or poor lifting techniques. It can also be caused by injury in a work place, by a sports accident or by muscular spasms. It often occurs during pregnancy or, because of decreased flexibility, as people get older.

There are also many diseases and pathological conditions that can lead to back pain. These include abdominal or pelvic disease, anxiety, arthritis, cervical or lumbar spondylosis, dermatological problems, kidney disease, rheumatic conditions, tumours and scoliosis.

Our modern, sedentary lifestyles have a profound effect on the development of back pain; indeed one of the most effective ways of preventing it is simply to stay active.

An average adult in the UK spends at least two hours a day in front of a computer screen or television set, and back problems can be triggered if they don't sit properly.

In an age of mobile phones and computer games, such troubles are increasingly inflicting children of school age as well.

Osteopathy and the treatment of back pain

Osteopathic treatment is often the most effective first line of attack in correcting problems caused by back pain. Speedy access to osteopathic care for acute patients often averts the possibility of conditions becoming chronic.

By correcting any underlying mechanical disturbances in the musculo-skeletal system, osteopaths can greatly relieve pain and distress, minimise dependency on drugs and slash the cost of treatment for side effects.

Osteopathic treatment often negates the need for further medical investigation or surgery, although osteopaths are skilled in diagnosing problems that require such investigation or treatment.

Back problems account for over 50% of the cases osteopaths see.

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.

Ten top tips for back care

1. For back pain, better to see your osteopath sooner than later.
2. Take regular exercise – your osteopath can say what's right for you.
3. Hours in one position can cause problems – avoid computer 'hump'.
4. During repetitive tasks, vary your rhythm and take frequent breaks.
5. Adjust car seats and on long journeys, take regular breaks to stretch.
6. Pace yourself with heavy work such as gardening – don't risk a disc!
7. Watch children's posture – they shouldn't carry bags on one shoulder or spend too long at a computer without breaks.
8. During pregnancy, osteopathy can help your body adjust to changes.
9. Avoid strain when lifting, particularly small children and shopping.
10. Your bed could be part of the problem. Seek osteopathic advice on choosing a new one.

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: Arthritis
- Osteopathy: Babies and children
- 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