

It is a common belief that babies and children should have no structural stresses or strains in their bodies, because they are ‘so young’. The reality is very different.

Babies and osteopathy

Birth is one of the most stressful events of our lives. The baby is subjected to enormous forces, as the uterus pushes to expel the baby against the natural resistance of the birth canal. The baby has to turn and twist as it squeezes through the bony pelvis, on its short but highly stimulating and potentially stressful journey.

The baby's head has the remarkable ability to absorb these stresses in a normal delivery. In order to reduce the size of the head, the soft bones overlap, bend and warp as the baby descends. The baby's chin is normally well tucked down towards its chest to reduce the presenting diameter of the head.

Many babies are born with odd shaped heads as a result. In the first few days, the head can usually be seen to gradually lose the extreme moulded shape, as the baby suckles, cries and yawns. However, this unmoulding process is often incomplete, especially if the birth has been difficult. As a result, the baby may have to live with some very uncomfortable stresses within its head and body.

Babies born by cesarean may also encounter problems from their development in utero. This is especially seen in breech babies who develop in unusual positions in relation to the mother's ribs and pelvis.

What effect does retained moulding have?

Some babies cope extremely well with even quite severe retained moulding and compression, and are contented and happy. For others it is a different story, and they can display a variety of problems.

Crying, irritable baby

Crying, fractious, irritable baby, needs to be rocked to sleep. Prefers being carried.

Reason

The baby may be uncomfortable, with a constant feeling of pressure in the head. This is made worse by the extra pressure on the head when lying down.

Feeding difficulties

The baby takes a long time to feed and one feed merges into the next. He/she may be a 'windy' feeder.

Reason

Feeding is difficult and tiring due to mechanical stresses through the head, face and throat. The nerves to the tongue may be irritated as they exit from the skull, which makes sucking difficult.

Sickness, colic and wind

Regurgitation of milk between feeds, bouts of prolonged crying due to colic and wind. Often worse in the evening.

Reason

The nerve to the stomach is irritated as it exists from the base of the skull, which impairs digestion. The diaphragm may be stressed or distorted, which further compromises both digestion and the ability of the stomach to retain its contents.

Sleep disturbances

The baby sleeps for only short periods, and may sleep little in the day (or night!) Wakes to the slightest noise.

Reason

The tension on the bony and membranous casing of the skull keeps the baby's nervous system in a persistently alert state.

Osteopathic treatment

Osteopathic treatment using the cranial approach is very gentle, safe and effective in the treatment of babies and children. Specific gentle pressure is applied where necessary to enable the inherent healing ability of the body to effect the release of stresses.

Could there be any adverse reactions?

Reactions to treatment are variable, often the baby or child is very relaxed afterwards and sleeps well. Others have a burst of energy after treatment, usually followed by a good night's sleep.

Occasionally children are unsettled after treatment. This is a temporary situation, and is usually caused when the release of the retained moulding has been incomplete. It is not always possible for all the retained moulding compression to release in one session, especially if it has been severe.

If you are concerned by any reaction to the treatment, please don't hesitate to contact the clinic at any time.

How many treatments will be needed?

On average, 2 to 6 treatments are sufficient. This varies according to the severity of the problem and the age of the child.

When to treat

The younger the better, it is never too early to treat. For best results, treatment should be before the age of 5 years. After this, the stresses and asymmetries cannot always be completely eliminated, but it is still possible to achieve beneficial release of the stresses throughout life.