

Osteopathy and pregnancy

Aches and pains are common during pregnancy, as the body changes shape to accommodate the increasing size and weight of the uterus. This involves considerable changes to posture. If the mother has existing back problems, or strains in her body from past accidents or trauma, it may be more difficult for her to accommodate these changes, and she may suffer more discomfort as a result. The ligaments of the whole body soften during pregnancy due to the action of hormones. This allows the bones of the pelvis to separate slightly during the delivery to facilitate the passage of the baby's head through the pelvis. Unfortunately this softening affects the whole body and makes it more vulnerable to strain during the pregnancy.

Postural changes may cause backache, neckache, headaches, aching legs and undue fatigue. Osteopathic treatment can help the body adapt, and make the pregnancy much more comfortable.

Nausea and Vomiting

Osteopathy can help by releasing debilitating physical strains caused by vomiting, and restoring ease and balance in the body's soft tissues. Treatment to improve the circulation to and from the liver can help reduce nausea.

Heart Burn

As the uterus expands, it can stretch and squash the diaphragm contributing to heartburn. Osteopathic treatment can often reduce tension and relieve heartburn.

Breathing Difficulties

Postural changes through the lower ribs and spine can impede the action of the diaphragm and make breathing difficult. Osteopathic treatment to improve function of the whole rib cage allows full use of available lung capacity.

Varicose Veins and Haemorrhoids

Tension within the pelvis or diaphragm area can increase

resistance to the return of venous blood to the heart from the lower half of the body. This can cause or aggravate varicose veins in the legs, and haemorrhoids. Osteopathic treatment to release tension in the pelvis and diaphragm regions is helpful in the prevention and treatment of these conditions.

Threatened Miscarriage

There are many reasons for miscarriage, and many are not preventable. In a relatively small number of cases physical limitations in the mother's body make it difficult for her to carry a pregnancy beyond a certain stage. This may cause repeated miscarriages at a similar stage. Osteopathic treatment can sometimes stabilise the pregnancy and allow it to proceed to full term.

Preparation for labour and position of the baby

As labour is likely to be more difficult if the baby is not lying correctly, it is worth trying to help them to move into a better position. The baby generally settles in a head downward position and facing backward with his spine curled in the same direction as his mother's spine. This puts the baby in the most advantageous position for passing through the birth canal during labour.

Self-Help tips to encourage the baby to lie correctly

- Try to keep as active as possible throughout the pregnancy.
- 'Walk tall', pushing your head upwards as if suspended by a string. Do not allow your lower back to slump into a very hollow position.
- Sitting slouched in soft chairs encourages the baby to turn into the back to back position. Where possible, sit with your bottom well back in the chair and the lower back supported. Better still, sitting on a foam wedge, or on a chair that has a seat that tilts forward, actively encourages the baby to lie correctly.
- If your baby is lying in either a breech or back to back position, then spending some time each day in an 'all fours' position can help it to turn.

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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. This is the reason that one pregnancy may be much more uncomfortable to carry than another.

An important part of preparation for childbirth is to ensure that the mother's pelvis and spine are structurally balanced and able to allow the passage of the baby down the birth canal. Trauma to the pelvic bones, coccyx, lumbar or sacrum at any time in a mother's life can leave increased tension in muscles and strain within the ligaments and bones of the pelvis. This can limit the ability of these bones to separate and move out of the way during labour, and thus limit the size of the pelvic outlet. Osteopathic treatment is extremely effective at releasing old strains within the pelvis, 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 help the baby turn into a better position.

Dystocia

Dystocia is defined as difficult labor and is something that every woman wants to avoid! In addition to the pain and exhaustion caused by long, difficult labours, dystocia leads to multiple medical interventions which can be physically and emotionally traumatic to mother and baby. Studies show a reduction in labor times and less intervention in women who have had osteopathic care during their pregnancy.

Treatment after Birth

Birth can be traumatic for both mother and baby, and osteopathy is effective at helping both to recover.

The mother's pelvis is vulnerable to lasting strains from the forces involved, particularly after a difficult delivery. Some of these strains can have a profound effect on the nervous system, and contribute to postnatal depression.

After giving birth, the body not only has to recover from the changes it made during pregnancy but also from the effects of delivery. All this whilst doing the very physically and mentally demanding job of caring for the new baby. Caring for a baby can place enormous strain on the back, during such activities as nursing in poor positions, lifting car seats especially in and out of the car, reaching over the cot, or carrying a child on one hip. Unresolved childbirth stresses in the mother can contribute to ongoing back problems, period problems, stress incontinence, constipation, headache and more. Osteopathic treatment can help the mother to return to normal, physically and emotionally, after birth by releasing strains from both pregnancy and labour. This allows her to relax and enjoy her new baby.

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 way of working with the body's own natural mechanism for releasing and re-balancing tensions, without force.