

After the baby is born

For Mother

After giving birth, the body has to recover from both the changes it made during pregnancy and from the effects of delivery. New mothers may suffer from aches and pains, and sometimes feel quite traumatised by the labour experience, or 'out of sorts'.

The mother's pelvis is often pulled out of balance by the passage of the baby, particularly after a difficult delivery. If the mother's feet are in stirrups for the delivery or stitching after birth, the weight of the legs puts huge leverage through the pelvis at a time when the pelvic ligaments have been stretched to their limit and are unstable. This is one of the most common causes of back problems after childbirth.

Unresolved childbirth stresses in the mother can contribute to ongoing **back problems, period problems, stress incontinence, general fatigue, constipation, headache** and more.

Postnatal depression

The sacrum is connected to the meninges or coverings of the brain and spinal cord, and if the sacrum is pulled out of position during birth it can impose a drag directly into the brain. This may contribute to the mother feeling out of sorts and tearful, or even to postnatal depression.

Caring for baby

Activities such as feeding in poor positions, lifting a car seat especially in an out of the car, reaching over the cot, or carrying a child on one hip can all place enormous strain on the back.

How can Osteopathy help?

Skilfully applied osteopathic treatment can help the mother return to normal, physically and mentally after birth by releasing strains from both pregnancy and labour. This allows her to relax and enjoy her new baby.

For baby

How was the birth for the baby?

Osteopaths consider the birth from the baby's point of view. Every baby's birth experience is unique, whether very rapid, long and drawn out, or a caesarean birth. In any delivery the baby may have been squashed, pulled or twisted in different ways, and this may leave a lasting effect on the baby.

In the first few days the most common difficulties are with **feeding, sleep and crying**. Any baby who is unsettled and struggling to feed may be uncomfortable from the effects of birth. Osteopathy may be able to help.

Unresolved birth stresses may contribute to many different problems as the child grows, including sleep and behaviour issues, vulnerability to repeated infections such as chest, ear or sinus infections, backache and headache, and difficulties with concentration and school work.

Osteopaths recommend that every baby is checked after birth.

Many osteopaths specialise in the treatment of babies and children using cranial osteopathy. Osteopathic treatment is extremely gentle, and is safe for the smallest of babies. It is never too early to treat.

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Osteopathy for Mother and Baby



Osteopathy for mother and baby

Osteopathic treatment can be beneficial in:

- Easing some of the discomforts of pregnancy
- Preparing for labour
- Helping mother and baby to recover after birth

Discomforts of pregnancy

Aches and Pains

Considerable postural changes are necessary to accommodate the increasing size and weight of the uterus. At the same time, hormonal changes cause ligaments all over the body to soften and stretch in preparation for labour. Any pre-existing back problems, or strains from past accidents or trauma may make it more difficult for the body to adapt, and may result in aches and pains in any area of the body.

Postural difficulties generally increase from around 20 weeks as the uterus becomes heavier and starts to take up more space in the abdomen. This may cause backache and sciatica, neckache, headaches, aching legs and undue fatigue.

The uterus can be visualised as a bag, like a hot air balloon, that is tethered low down into the pelvis by specific ligaments. Movements such as bending down picking up shopping, or another child can strain these uterine ligaments causing abdominal discomfort in the groin, and backache.

Symphysis Pubic Dysfunction (SPD)

The two pubic bones meet at the front of the pelvis at the pubic symphysis. This joint is held together by ligaments. In pregnancy all ligaments soften and this can lead to a painful stretching or separation of the pubic symphysis. This causes pain at the front of the pelvis, worse on exercise and towards the end of the day. SPD may be aggravated by restrictions in the lower spine and sacrum that disturb normal pelvic mechanics.

Changes around the diaphragm

As the baby gradually fills the abdomen the intestines are pushed upwards, and the lower ribs flare outwards to create more space. This changes the tension and balance in the diaphragm and can contribute to a number of different problems.

- Distortion of the loop of muscle that closes the entrance of the stomach may cause **heartburn**
- Congestion in and around the liver may increase the size of the liver, and cause discomfort, **nausea and vomiting**
- Restriction of the venous blood flow as it passes through the diaphragm back to the heart may contribute to **varicose veins and haemorrhoids**
- Shortness of breath and vulnerability to **chest infections** as the lung volume is reduced.

Stress in pregnancy

Research has shown that anxiety or stress in pregnancy affects the developing baby. High adrenaline levels in the mother are mirrored by the baby, who is more likely to be unsettled after birth and suffer from infantile colic. Whilst there are some stresses that are unavoidable, mothers should try to remain relaxed and calm as much as possible. Osteopathy is very helpful in releasing the effects of stress and tension in the body, and helping mothers to keep calm.

Osteopathic treatment in pregnancy

Pregnant mothers often report that osteopathic treatment helps them to feel better in many ways. This may be the relief of physical aches and pains, improvements in ailments such as nausea or heartburn, or just feeling less tired and more relaxed. This helps in being able to cope physically and mentally with this big life change.

Osteopaths are highly skilled and undergo a minimum of 4 years training. Gentle osteopathic techniques are very beneficial and perfectly safe at all stages of pregnancy.

Preparation for labour

Osteopaths check the mother's pelvis to ensure it is balanced and ready to allow the passage of the baby.

Past accidents or falls commonly leave a legacy of restricted movement or strain in the pelvis, even if no symptoms are present. This can limit the ability of these bones to move and create the largest possible space for the baby during labour.

Osteopathic treatment to release any restrictions within the pelvis gives the best chance of an easy and uncomplicated labour.

Position of the baby

To facilitate the passage through the birth canal the best position for the baby is head downward and facing backward with his spine curled in the same direction as his mother's spine. Other positions may prolong labour and make it more difficult for both mother and baby. Osteopathic treatment to balance the pelvis may help the baby to lie in a better position.

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.
- Try to hold your tummy in to avoid excessive hollowing of your back
- 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 seat that tilts forward 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.