

OSTEOPATHY:

THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR BODY'S PAIN

By Deirdre Byrne and Caryn Seniscal

The word osteopathy originates from the two Greek words “osteone,” which means structure, and “pathos,” which means pain. Osteopathic treatment is based on the concept that the structure of the body affects how it will function and that it functions as a unified whole. In other words, if there is a problem or restriction in one part of the body, then all the other parts are affected in some way and often there is pain. Osteopathy uses gentle, manual techniques to release these restrictions so normal function can ensue and the pain is decreased or eliminated.

Dr. Andrew Taylor Still developed the concept of osteopathy. Discouraged with conventional medicine in 1864 after he lost four of his children to disease, he searched for a drugless, hands-on approach to medicine, which he named osteopathy.

Three Methods of Osteopathic Treatment

Osteopathic treatment aims to restore optimal health by treating the primary restriction and not just treating the compensations (or symptoms). Osteopathy includes three major methods of treatment: structural osteopathy, cranial osteopathy and visceral manipulation. The art of osteopathy is understanding how these three systems affect each other, and how to blend treatment techniques from all three for the greatest therapeutic effect.

Structural Osteopathy: Structural techniques mobilise joints and relieve tension in muscles, ligaments and fascia. Fascia is a continuous system of connective tissue which surrounds the entire structure of the body – even the lungs and digestive organs. Fascia can become short or adherent to other structures with poor biomechanics, poor posture or when injury or trauma has occurred. Due to its continuous nature throughout the body, an area of fascial tension like a scar can create pain and discomfort in seemingly unrelated areas of the body. Structural techniques can help release this and improve nerve function and circulation.

Cranial Osteopathy: Cranial osteopathy is based on Sutherland’s concept that the bones of the cranium do not fuse with age and there is some micro-movement occurring at the sutures. When cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) is produced in the brain, the brain expands. This creates a tension on the dura that surrounds it, causing the cranial bones to move in a rhythmical pattern. The tension in the dura at one end is transmitted along the spinal cord to the other end, causing the sacrum to have a rhythmical motion



also. Cranio-sacral therapy can have a profound effect on the body by improving the circulation of all body fluids, calming the nervous system and removing patterns of strain anywhere in the body.

Visceral Manipulation: Visceral manipulation is based on the principle that organs normally have mobility in response to the body moving and to normal bodily functions. Restrictions caused by surgeries, scars, infections, immobile joints and altered nerve conduction affect the functioning of the organs. Osteopathy offers gentle treatment techniques for the organs and the fascia that supports them, which can improve function by restoring proper motion. It is, however, important to seek medical advice for complete diagnosis of medical conditions.

Practitioners and Conditions Treated

Osteopathic treatment is adapted to each individual and is suitable for clients of all ages, from newborns to seniors. Conditions treated by osteopathy include: joint dysfunction, arthritic pain, back and neck pain, whiplash, headaches, jaw problems, soft tissue injuries (sprains, tendonopathies), nerve pain (sciatica, tingling, numbness), difficult digestion (acid reflux, constipation), painful periods, chronic pelvic pain, bladder issues and pregnancy discomfort, plus colic, recurrent ear infections, and flattening of the head in babies. Many childhood issues can respond very positively to osteopathic intervention. The position that a baby adopts in the womb or a birth that is prolonged, too rapid, or assisted by forceps or vacuum can place considerable forces on a baby’s head. Cranial osteopathy can help mobilise and realign the bones of the head and jaw, and if orthodontia is necessary later it can help the cranium adapt to the changes.

Graduates of the Canadian College of Osteopathy (CCO) receive a diploma in osteopathic manual practice D.O.M.P. The training is an intensive five-year, part-time program open to health professionals or those who already hold a university degree in the health sciences. In BC, manual osteopaths are called “Osteopathic Practitioners” and have distinguished themselves from Osteopathic Physicians. Osteopathic practitioners are not medical doctors and practice the traditional osteopathic approach as developed by Still and Sutherland. Osteopathy is covered in B.C. by most extended health care plans.

Deirdre Byrne and Caryn Seniscal co-founded the Vancouver Osteopathy Centre in 2008. The centre has assembled an international team of practitioners whose primary concern is the delivery of osteopathic excellence and continued professional development. Please visit www.vancouverosteopathycentre.com or call 604-732-0606 for more detailed information on the services they provide.