



OSTEOPATHIC INFORMATION SERVICE

An introduction to osteopathy and the GOsC

Osteopaths are statutorily regulated health professionals forming an integral part of primary care teams.

What is the General Osteopathic Council?

The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) was established under the Osteopaths Act 1993 to regulate, promote and develop the osteopathic profession in the UK, maintaining a Statutory Register of those entitled to practise osteopathy.

The Statutory Register

Only practitioners meeting the highest standards of safety and competency are eligible for registration. Proof of good health, good character and professional indemnity insurance cover is also a requirement.

It is an offence for anyone to describe themselves as an osteopath and practise as such, unless registered with the GOsC. The public can, therefore, be confident in visiting an osteopath that they will experience safe and competent treatment from a practitioner who adheres to a strict Code of Conduct.

You can obtain details of an osteopath's registration by telephoning the GOsC on **020 7357 6655**. A searchable listing is also available at www.osteopathy.org.uk.

Education and Training

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.

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.

What do osteopaths treat?

Osteopaths treat a wide range of patients and conditions:

- **Half suffer low back trouble**
Most back pains result from mechanical disturbances of the spine – postural strains, joint derangements and spinal disc injuries. Osteopathy, with its comprehensive approach to healthcare, is a particularly successful approach to treatment.
- **Over half are women**
Many women are working mothers and combining both aspects of their lives can give rise to problems from the perennial headache to debilitating musculo-skeletal disorders. Many headaches originate from stiffness and tension in the neck and osteopathic treatment can often bring relief. Pregnancy can put a strain on the whole spine and osteopathic treatment can help the body adapt to the many changes it experiences.
- **A quarter are in the forties**
Many patients are losing fitness at this stage in their lives and are more prone to injury. Osteopaths consider the whole person, examining posture and the strength and flexibility of muscles, ligaments and tendons. Treatment is designed to alleviate current problems and to help prevent recurrences.
- **Many are elderly**
Pain-killers are not the only solution for the aches and pains associated with ageing. For more permanent relief it is necessary to eliminate the underlying causes of pain, a job for which the osteopath is specifically trained. Osteopathy can also help to reduce pain and stiffness in the less acute stages of arthritis.
- **Many problems relate to work**
Work, whether at a computer terminal or in heavy industry, can give rise to disorders of muscles, tendons and joints, particularly in the back, hands and arms. Osteopaths treat many conditions related to the workplace and can give remedial advice and preventative exercise.

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.

Patient Protection

An important function of the GOsC is to deal with patients' concerns and complaints about osteopaths. Parliament has given the Council strong powers to act in cases where osteopaths fall short of the high standards of conduct and competence required for registration.

Anyone with a concern or complaint about the professional conduct or competence of an osteopath should first try to resolve the matter with the osteopath involved. If this approach fails, then they should contact the GOsC who will be able to advise on the next steps they should take.

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 provides a general introduction to osteopathy and the work of the GOsC. For details of more specific conditions osteopaths treat, please contact us for copies of the following:

- Osteopathy: Arthritis
- Osteopathy: Babies and children
- Osteopathy: Back Pain
- Osteopathy: 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