**How Manual Osteopathy Can Aid in Healing and Injury Prevention**

Manual osteopathy is a natural therapeutic medical procedure that is focused on restoring body functions by correcting imbalance and pain. Medications and surgeries are not involved as the procedure adopts the concept that the body is capable of spontaneous self-healing. The practitioners focus on the muscles, the spine and the joints to encourage the natural self-healing and self-regulation ability of the body. The osteopathic physicians use manual expertise to balance all the systems in the body rather than concentrating only on the troubled area. Osteopaths are trained physicians that use their palpatory abilities to feel the situation of the systems or tissues under investigations (Puttick, 2006). The cost of this procedure differs depending on the patient’s state of residence and insurance plan. Discussed below are osteopathic treatment methods and medical conditions which apply osteopathic mediation in injury prevention, healing or pain management.

**Methods Used in the Osteopathic Treatment**

**Manipulation of the Soft Tissues**

The manipulation is used in the assessment of tissues, improving the flow of body fluids in the region, restoring function, and minimizing rigidity. Optimizing fluid flow in the neurovascular system eases fluid retention that may be harmful to the body, and it also encourages the efficiency of the immune system. Osteopaths will continuously check on the condition of the tissues to ensure functionality is restored without the tissue being over treated (Majchrzycki, Warzecha, & Kocur, 2011).

**Cranial Osteopathy**

Cranial osteopathy is the most gentle and basic technique. It is used to evaluate and to restore mobility of the contents of the skull, the spine, the sacrum and other body parts.  The aim is to restore balance and optimization of flow in the neurovascular system that surrounds the Central Nervous System's autonomic centers, hence fine-tuning the physiology of the body (Liem, 2009).

**Visceral Manipulation**

It is used to treat organs like kidney, stomach, intestines and the viscera. Osteopaths gently shift the structures, and the surrounding fascia reinstates their full movement.  When gently done, this manipulation can improve organ mobility, enhance neurovascular flow around the organ and maximize functionality (Hebgen, 2011).

**Articular Techniques**

This involves the gentle movement of two adjacent joint surfaces to reduce pain, stiffness, spasms in the surrounding muscles and relieving nerve irritations. It applies less pressure than that applied in joint manipulation. The patient is positioned such that minimal pressure is exerted on the surrounding soft tissue during the procedure (Speece, Crow, & Simmons, 2009).

**Osteopathy in injury prevention, pain management and healing**

Detailed below are standard conditions that affect the body systems and the musculoskeletal framework and how osteopathy helps in healing, pain relief and management of such conditions.

**Osteopathic Pain Management in Osteoarthritis**

Osteoarthritis is one of the most commonly occurring forms of Arthritis that is degenerative and causes ‘wear and tear’ commonly affecting hip and knee joints but in some cases the feet, hands, ankles, wrists and the spine. It causes friction that makes movement difficult leading to stiffness, pain and inflammation. Arthritis is a standard part of the ageing process, and people may assume that they have to adapt to the symptoms because the condition is incurable, but osteopaths may be helpful in pain management and prevention of further injury.

Osteopaths free rigidity of muscles neighboring affected joints, improve mobility and improve the health of the joints through improving the flow of lymph fluid and blood in and out of the joints. This, in turn, relieves pain and swelling while improving the resilience of the affected joints. Furthermore, osteopathy will encourage optimization of the roles of allied body parts that ensures mobility and loading are disseminated evenly. To achieve this, a range of techniques including stretching, joint mobilization and soft articulation are applied depending on the severity of the damage caused by osteoarthritis. These pain relief strategies improve the quality of life in osteoarthritis patients.

**Osteopathic Correction of Postural Issues**

Postural issues often arise from pregnancy, constant strenuous sitting posture at work and sometimes as a result of sports injury. Poor posture as a result of lack of exercise and constant hunched sitting position induce shortening of the fascia which makes one develop a hunched posture, reduced mobility as a result of back pain, a strained diaphragm that reduces the oxygen concentration, digestive problems and headaches.

Osteopathic intervention, in this case, is vital in regaining motion in stiff joints and improved stretchiness of the shortened muscles. This is through stretching exercises, soft tissue manipulation, joint manipulation and recommendations of practices that aim to rectify the injury by relaxing the strained and jammed joints and muscles, relieving pain and bettering the muscle tone (Majchrzycki, Warzecha, & Kocur, 2011). Posture is acquired over a period hence osteopathic intervention should ideally be offered before the development of chronic posture issues in those with desk jobs.

Osteopathic advice that can be offered to those at risk due to a busy work schedule that demands they sit all through are; upright sitting posture and positioning the screen at eye level to prevent constant head bending. Stretching each time one stands up from the desk by holding hands together, in front and pushed outwards, moving the neck and head upwards, sideways and down thereby stretching and realigning the muscles. Avoiding leg crossing while sitting as it may induce excessive movement of hips which in turn induce pain in the upper back.  Osteopathy in postural issues can, therefore, be used to prevent the situation, heal the pain and correct the problem in those affected.

**Osteopathy in the treatment of neuralgia**

Neuralgia is caused by injury or pressure that cause distress along with a nerve path leading to pain. Stress on cranial nerves, nerve roots exiting the spinal cord or entrapment of peripheral nerve roots cause different types of neuralgia. Medical conditions such as diabetes and hypothyroidism may also cause peripheral neuropathy. This discussion focuses on trigeminal neuralgia arising from pressure on the cranial nerves and sciatica from stress on peripheral nerve roots.

**Trigeminal Neuralgia**

The trigeminal nerve is a cranial nerve liable for sensory information such as pain emerging from the face above the jawbone and for motor transmission of muscles concerned with chewing but not those of facial expression. Inflammation or pressure on this nerve causes a sudden sharp stab-like pain on the side of the face; cheeks, scalp or forehead that can last several minutes or can be intermittent. Existing medical interventions such as surgical and medical therapy are fair in the management of this condition, but a significant number of patients are not satisfied with the outcomes like not responding to treatments, surgical complications and relapses. Non- invasive therapies like osteopathy, in this case, can be recommended to patients by their physicians in cases of essential trigeminal neuralgia.

Adjusting tensions between the face, the base of the skull and the neck to ease tensions that can cause pressure on the trigeminal nerve is a crucial osteopathic intervention that also relieves pressure on the blood circulation of these parts. This is achieved through gentle face massages, gentle articulation of the base of the skull and gentle neck massages and stretches. This is one of the most painful conditions that can cause significant distress in patients therefore standard osteopathic treatment aimed at early diagnosis, and cranial stress release is therefore essential in pain management and function restoration (Liem, 2009).

**Sciatica**

This describes symptoms of pain felt in the leg and maybe numbness, tingling and sometimes weakness originating in the lower back, moving along the buttocks down the sciatic nerve located at the back of each leg. In most cases, sciatica is caused by injury of the intervertebral disc due to a hernia or degenerative disease that causes friction and irritation of the sciatic nerve.

Osteopaths employ techniques such as massage and mobilisation of muscles and joints, connective tissue gentle liberation techniques and stretching to release stress on the sciatic nerve, joints, irritated lumbar disc and also to reduce inflammation. These techniques result in pain reduction. Treatments also include therapies that optimise lymphatic drainage and blood circulation hence osteopaths treat not only the site of injury but also improve whole body functions (Valat, Genevay, Marty, Rozenberg, & Koes, 2010).

**Osteopathy in Lateral Epicondylitis**

This is also referred to as tennis elbow; it results from overloading of the tendons in the elbow by repetitive movement of the arms and wrist. Contrary to the name athletes are not the only ones susceptible to this; plumbers, carpenters and other professionals whose job involve repetitive arm movement can be affected. Pain occurs where the forearm muscle tendons attach to the outer elbow and may spread to the forearm and further onto the wrists. Symptoms include weakness and pain that may result in difficulties in grasping objects, shaking hands and turning doorknobs.

Disabling symptoms might result in a recommendation for surgery which is invasive, risky and can lead to further complications of the arm. Osteopaths apply manipulation tactics, and message to determine the genesis of the problem as non-painful preexisting problems with the shoulder, neck and wrist may also lead to tennis elbow (Speece, Crow, & Simmons, 2009). Easing pain and restoration of regular activity is the goal of manual osteopathy. The practitioners can also offer advice on movements to refrain from, specific exercises and elbow brace support (Majchrzycki, Warzecha, & Kocur, 2011)that is appropriate. Restoration of arm function by osteopaths is a healing process that is vital in the prevention of risky advanced medical interventions like surgeries that come with potentially harmful post-treatment complications like wound infections.

**Osteopathy for Sleep Disorders**

Satisfactory night’s sleep rejuvenates and keeps the physical and psychological state of the body in check.  External influences like anxiety, stress and muscle tension due to poor posture can result in sleeping disorders. In some instances the body receives pronounced physical and cognitive provocations just before bedtime hence deter sleep; osteopathy intervenes at the neurovegetative system level as this system is responsible for handling the excitement.

Craniosacral osteopathy can be used in the management of sleep disorders; it focuses on the neurovegetative system and extends to the parasympathetic subsystem. The neurovegetative system controls automatic functions of the body like respiration and is made up of subsystems that are opposite but balance. Parasympathetic system functions among others are to release insulin, vitalise digestion and slow down of organs. Craniosacral region encompasses bones of the skull, mouth, face and to the lower section of the spinal cord via a network of membranes and hydraulics and extends to the sacrum.

Gentle manipulation using osteopathic techniques allows seamless healing of craniosacral region contrary to mechanical strategies that repair the problem. Knowledge of a person’s habit and intensive osteopathic investigations allows for treatment of various body zones that contribute to sleep disorders and in this case quality sleep is regained after about three sessions. Osteopathy can also foretell sleep disruptions due to hard, stressful times, and it prevents progression to other problems like fatigue and irritability (Liem, 2009).

**Conclusion**

Osteopathy can be used as a complementary therapy alongside conventional medical interventions to boost the health of an individual, and it can also detect other medical conditions which if not treatable by osteopathy, the patient is referred to specialists. Pain relief in conditions of extreme pain like trigeminal neuralgia using osteopathic methods is essential in restoring the quality of the patients as extreme pain can impair their professional work, cause extreme discomfort, lack of sleep and extreme irritability. Also, healing of rigid and painful joints and tendons in tennis elbow or golfers elbow using osteopathy prevents invasive methods like surgeries that have a potential of complications including wound infections and non-satisfactory results like further damage. Osteopathic intervention heals the whole body as the focus is not only on the site of the injury but also in fine-tuning of other body systems (Posadzki & Ernst, 2011). Like any other interventions, there are also some risks involved in osteopathy. Such risks can be stiffness that can last up to two days following the procedure and more complicated risks like stroke and nerve damage that may require emergency medical intervention.

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