

Natural Treatment for Torticollis in Babies

An Osteopathic approach to improving neck motion.

Neck stiffness, called torticollis or congenital torticollis, is a very common musculoskeletal problem found in babies. This condition in adults is sometimes referred to as a “wry neck”. Babies suffering from torticollis commonly have their head tilted to one side and are only able to voluntarily turn their head in one direction. If not treated effectively, this decreased movement can lead to many other problems. Osteopathy in the cranial field is a gentle, natural therapy which helps to normalize neck and head mobility, allowing the child to turn their head comfortably in both directions.

A very common problem associated with torticollis in infants is irritability and poor attachment during breast feeding, with the newborn often not feeding well from one or both breasts. This may be due to pain which the baby feels in the neck or a limited ability to open their mouth wide enough to attach properly.

Other common problems include the development of a flat spot or a misshapen head and face due to the child always lying on the one side. Some infants may even be experiencing reflux or colic associated with the restricted neck mobility due to an irritation of the nerves which supply the stomach and gastro intestinal system on their course from the head to these areas.

There are several causes of torticollis. Osteopathic examination often shows a biomechanical restriction or imbalance between the upper part of the neck and the base of the skull. This imbalance is often caused by the birth itself.

The bone at the back of the head, the occiput, sits on top of the neck. During the delivery this area, along with the upper neck, undergoes an incredible amount of compression and rotation force as the baby moves through the pelvis. Additional factors such as the shape of the mother’s pelvis and whether instruments such as forceps were used can further compound these restrictions.

Torticollis can also develop in the womb depending upon how the baby was positioned during the later stages of the pregnancy. Mothers of these babies commonly complain that their baby’s head was stuck under their ribs or had pushed heavily on their sciatic nerve during the pregnancy.

Apart from the restriction in the joints of the upper neck other tissues maybe involved. There are a lot of connective tissues, muscles and membranes that help move the head. Some of these muscles can be tight, pulling and turning the head to one side. If there are any biomechanical strains in the upper rib cage and spine this can also influence the mobility of the neck.

Restrictions in the pelvis will also have an indirect affect on the functioning of the upper cervical spine and the base of the skull. Restrictions in other areas of the head and face may also contribute to torticollis in infancy. This is because all the bones in the head are joined together by sutures and membranes which is like a complex jigsaw puzzle. One area of dysfunction can affect the whole of the head.

This is where cranial osteopathy can help. The osteopath applies a gentle, balancing pressure to the areas of biomechanical restriction such as in the cranium and spine to improve the mobility of the neck. Approximately 4 weeks of treatment is usually needed to normalize mobility and help to settle any other associated symptoms.

Osteopaths undergo five years of university training and are highly skilled manual therapists with a very good understanding of anatomy, embryology, physiology and pathology. Osteopaths are government recognized and registered. For further information visit www.brisbaneosteopathic.com.au.

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