

# Natural Treatment For Mastitis

## *Osteopathy – A Drug Free Approach*

Mastitis is an inflammation of the breast tissues and is a common problem for breastfeeding mothers. In breastfeeding women it is generally due to a blocked milk duct that becomes inflamed and can also then become infected. The earliest symptom is usually the breast becoming warmer which is a sign that inflammation has accumulated in the area. This progresses to the breast becoming red and painful. At this stage the lymphatic system is unable to cope with the excess fluid and so some of the milk is forced into the venous blood. This leads to an immune reaction for the mother. At this stage, whether the milk duct is infected or not, if left untreated the mother experiences flu like symptoms that rapidly lead to a fever. There are a number of triggers for mastitis including being fatigued or using an inefficient feeding position where one milk duct is not completely emptied. The most well known treatment for this condition is antibiotics, however this merely kills the bacteria, if present, and doesn't address the cause of the inflammation. Unfortunately, most mothers don't realise that osteopathy is a drug free alternative for the treatment of mastitis.

Due to being run down, Judy first started to get mastitis symptoms when her newborn was four weeks of age, and had also noted that she had experienced poor milk supply for the last few weeks. She consulted an osteopath and a few hours after the treatment her symptoms started lessening and by the next day she was greatly improved.

Osteopathic treatment for mastitis focuses on improving the movement of different parts of the body including muscles, connective tissue, joints and bones so they move freely with each breath. This essential motion helps to maintain movement of blood and lymphatic fluid by altering pressure gradients in the whole body and is particularly important in cases of infection and inflammation. For breastfeeding women, this fluid needs to come into the breast tissue and then drain away properly. If the motion is impeded, fluid congestion occurs and it can become a breeding ground for bacteria.

Mary was referred to an osteopath by a lactation consultant because of her frequent episodes of mastitis and recurrent need for antibiotics. Osteopathic examination showed marked stiffness through her upper back. Many years of breastfeeding, looking after her other three children, as well as a bad car accident she was involved in when she was younger were most likely the causes of this stiffness and therefore the frequency of mastitis. Treatment was aimed at decreasing the tension through her muscles and joints and allowing balance of the nervous system to help normalise blood supply to the chest and breast. Treatment also helped improve lymphatic drainage to help clear up the blocked duct. Mary had two treatments and responded well, reporting she hasn't had another bout of mastitis since.

Apart from treating the mastitis, osteopaths can also give advice about things which mothers can do at home to help improve the existing case of mastitis and to avoid future bouts. There are also various massage procedures the osteopath can teach either the father or a family friend which can be a helpful adjunct to treatment. It is important to realise that continuing to feed as much as possible during this time is very helpful.

Osteopathy can help reduce the symptoms and decrease the likelihood of needing antibiotics. Treatment can also help reduce the tendency for recurrent mastitis and help increase milk supply if that has been affected. So if you or someone you know is suffering from a case of mastitis, osteopathy is an option for those who wish to minimise antibiotic use and even as an adjunctive therapy for mothers on antibiotics who are experiencing recurrent bouts of this disabling condition.

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