



Information sheet: Osteopathy

What is Osteopathy?

Osteopaths provide a package of care relevant to the individual patient. That may include one or more of gentle manual therapy, general health information, self-management advice and exercise therapy. When visiting an osteopath, a patient can expect a full medical case history to be conducted, taking into account factors such as occupation, previous injury, posture and the patient's goals of treatment as well as red and yellow flag questioning.

What does the therapy do?

Osteopaths are allied health professionals and musculoskeletal (MSK) experts, who through complex interventions involving multiple components, take a patient-centred approach to support optimal health and self-management. People commonly visit osteopaths for a range of MSK conditions as well as to aid other health conditions. There is a well-deserved, evidence-based reputation for expertise in the treatment of neck and lower back pain.

Are there any safety concerns?

Using manual therapy, osteopaths provide safe, effective treatment and care that aims to promote the health and wellbeing of people. The reporting of adverse effects is rare.

What are the training standards?

Training is to degree level and includes over 1000 hours of clinical placements (direct patient contact time) prior to graduation. This intensive medical training equips osteopaths with an in-depth knowledge of anatomy, physiology and robust clinical methods and examination techniques for the musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, respiratory, neurological systems and the abdomen.

Is Osteopathy regulated?

Osteopaths are regulated by law and recognised as one of the Allied Health Professions by NHS England. This gives osteopaths similar status to a dentist or physiotherapist and guarantees patients the equivalent high level of care. They must be registered with the General Osteopathic Council (a statutory regulator reporting to the Professional Standards Authority), promoting patient safety by setting and monitoring standards of osteopathic education and conduct. The term 'osteopath' is a protected title.

How do I find an osteopath?

The General Osteopathic Council, the statutory regulator, has a search facility of registered practitioners on which you can search for an osteopath either by name or by area:

www.osteopathy.org.uk

Is there an evidence base?

There is good evidence for expertise in the treatment of neck and lower back pain. Osteopaths can also deliver packages of care recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for several other MSK conditions (Bronfort *et al*, 2010 and www.iosteopathy.org/research-and-reports).

The Institute of Osteopathy invests in research such as the implementation of a standardised MSK Patient Reported Outcome Measure tool for the profession. Preliminary findings (over 2500 completed data sets) show that over 50% of patients reported and improvement in symptoms after one week of treatment and 73% reported an improvement at six weeks post treatment.

Research also shows that 96% of patients expressed confidence in the treatment and advice from their osteopaths and 93% felt that their experience of osteopathic care was very good.