

Head to Toe

OSTEOPATHIC NEWSLETTER

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Head to Toe is a quarterly osteopathic newsletter distributed by local osteopaths. If you would like to receive this regularly, contact the osteopath named in the panel.

If there are any general questions you would like answered which you think may be of interest to other readers, please email them to info@h-t-t.co.uk. We will try to include them in a future issue of *Head to Toe*. Any questions regarding your own condition or treatment should be raised with your osteopath.

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Elbows

The elbow is a clever joint. It allows bending and twisting movements of the arm. It connects one long bone from the shoulder to two long bones ending at the wrist. Special muscles turn the two long bones around each other, so we can have our palms facing up or down. We should ask ourselves whether we tend to favour the muscles that keep our hands palms down (think of writing, computer work or many household chores) or whether we are often required to keep our palms facing upwards.



At the wrist, the two long bones from the elbow join the many bones of the hand. Muscles from these two long bones allow us to curl our hands inwards or to pull our hands back outwards. How often do we turn our hands outwards?

As adults, most of us tend to use our bodies in one way more than another. Commonly, we use our arms in front of us, where we can see what we are doing. Sometimes

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this will involve repetitive use and maybe force to lift an object and hold it for some while. In this way, some muscles become overused. Long-term overuse can lead to painful inflammation at the tendon (where the muscle joins the bone) and entrapment of nerves (causing pain and sometimes weakness in the arm), experienced as:

- pain that may go away after a day or so but reoccurs if the activity that started the pain is repeated
- pain that may interrupt sleep and that becomes more easily triggered with any movement of the hand during the day.

By the time we have symptoms we will have been doing the action that caused the problems for some time - possibly years. We may also have had an injury, perhaps a fall onto the arm or shoulder, that hurt initially but then seemed to

improve. The impact of an injury can disturb the mechanical balance of the bones and muscles in the arm, even just slightly, and over time result in similar symptoms.

So sometimes we can identify why we have this sort of problem - the result of a fall, or how we use our hands and arms. Occasionally it is more

difficult to find the cause. It is important to remember that there may be other reasons for experiencing pain in the elbow, such as arthritis or rheumatism or problems in the neck. It is very important to see your osteopath at the early stages of experiencing pain. In general, the quicker treatment is started, the sooner it will heal.

Common Conditions

Tennis and Golfer's Elbow

Tennis elbow and golfer's elbow are names given to different types of pain at the elbow that usually originate from overuse.

Symptoms with tennis elbow (also called lateral epicondylitis) include:

- pain on or near the bony part of the outside of the elbow, usually of the dominant hand
- pain on the outside of the elbow when the hand is bent back against resistance or the fingers straightened against resistance.

Tennis elbow can literally be caused by playing tennis, for example with a grip that is too small or using a 'wrist' action on backhand shots. Other people may use their hands and arms similarly - mechanics, painters, plasterers, and can suffer the same kinds of symptoms.

Symptoms with golfer's elbow (also called medial epicondylitis) include:

- pain on the bony part of the inside of the elbow
- pain on the inside of the elbow when you grip something hard
- weakness of the wrist.

Golfer's elbow arises from overuse of the muscles which pull the palm of the hand towards the arm. It is common in throwers and golfers and is also (confusingly) seen in tennis players who use a lot of top spin on



their forehand shots. It is more frequently seen in people who do not do sports but do work with their arms and hands.

Treatment

Prompt treatment is very important. You are then more likely to heal quickly and have a full recovery. Get to your osteopath as soon as you can.

Use an ice-pack - a bag of frozen peas well wrapped in a towel held over the painful area for 20 minutes. Be sure to watch the colour of the skin and avoid 'ice burn'.

Rest is vital - ideally you will be able to identify those activities that either produced or provoke the symptoms and stop doing them. This may be fine for a sports person who can stop playing for three or four weeks. It can be very difficult if the activity is part of your employment. You will need to try to find alternative ways to do your work, for example by using different tools or by using your whole body differently. Ask your osteopath for advice on this.

An arm brace can be worn around the elbow. This reduces the movement at the elbow and hence can reduce the irritation to an inflamed area.

Pain medication: Speak to your osteopath, GP or pharmacist about suitable anti-inflammatory drugs.

Osteopathic treatment: The osteopath will look closely at the circumstances in which your elbow condition has arisen and will examine your elbow and arm to determine exactly where the problem is. Your osteopath will also consider the

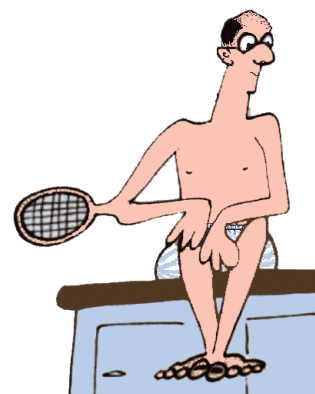
involvement of your shoulder and neck and posture in general. Treatment will eventually include exercises to stretch tight, overused muscles and strengthen weak, underused muscles.

Healing and rehabilitation of the elbow will be crucially determined by:

- how quickly you get treatment
- how well you are able to make the lifestyle

changes that include resting the arm and keeping to a new exercise regime.

If you can manage both then you should experience a full recovery.



? My nine-year-old daughter wakes at night with pain in her knees. We have been to the GP who says that these are 'growing pains', not to worry and that they will pass. Is there anything I can do?

Growing pains are very common, especially between the ages of 5 and 12. Children feel pain in their legs and sometimes also in their arms, which usually appears during the evenings or during the nights. In the legs, pain often occurs around or behind the knee, the calf, the thigh and sometimes the shin. It is more likely to happen after an especially active day and is usually gone by the next morning. Typically, the child's movement is not affected and there is no limping but, depending on your child's discomfort and their pain threshold, there may be some kind of protective stiffness.

Growing pains occur in healthy children, where growth and development are normal. In spite of this it is useful to consult the GP or osteopath to ensure that the pain is not caused by some other uncommon problem, such as juvenile arthritis - which requires a clear diagnosis and different treatment.

Growing pains occur when growth and development of different parts of the musculo-skeletal system happen at slightly different rates. For example, a long bone such as the bone in the thigh, grows faster than the muscles that run alongside it. The muscles may not have enough elasticity and the

tendons that join them to the bones of the knee may become overstretched.

The development of the musculo-skeletal system is influenced in two main ways: what happens inside the body and what happens on the outside.

Inside the body, hormones, the inherited genetic makeup and the child's nutrition all affect the process of growth.

Outside, there are the normal mechanical stresses of the child's everyday life, such as lifting objects and moving around. These also determine how the musculo-skeletal system develops and grows. Different types of forces stimulate growth of different tissues. Normal optimal growth relies on intermittent exposure to normal mechanical loads.

Ultimately, a good level of regular physical activity, a balanced diet and sufficient rest during these growing years are very important. During growth spurts and at times of growing pains it is especially useful to stretch out muscles before and after activity, especially the hamstring and calf muscles.

Osteopathic treatment is very useful in treating a child's body during growth spurts. The treatment is able to restore a new balance to the body, integrating those tissues - such as the muscles and the bones - that are growing at differing paces. Osteopathic treatment around the time of, or during, a growth spurt is especially useful and long lasting.

Get Well Soon

Accidents do happen. And so does injury and surgery. All of these things can set you back, but there are things that you can do to improve your recovery.

Convalescence

Convalescence is the period in which the body recovers from a serious illness, injury or surgery. Changes to your lifestyle may be needed to make sure the body has enough time and rest to allow a complete recovery. Make sure you know how long your full recovery is expected to take - days, weeks, months - and make sure you get enough rest. Listen to your body and alternate periods of activity with periods of relaxation. Be prepared to say 'no' to things you can't cope with and to visitors you don't want to see. A diet rich in antioxidants and minerals that promote tissue repair (see below) should give you the head start you need for a speedy recovery.

Set 'recovery' goals

During convalescence, it is a good idea to set goals for each day which will aid in your recovery. For example:

- Don't stay in bed too much. It generally isn't good for you. Try to maintain some level of activity, even just sitting or standing up.
- Ensure your muscles, heart and lungs are working efficiently which will speed your recovery by gradually increasing your level of activity each day.
- As your strength returns, find time to do things you enjoy. Keep up with hobbies and aim to get out of the house regularly, even for short outings.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. If your appetite is poor, try eating small amounts of nutritious foods regularly. Remember that eating well is more important than eating more.



Damage to and stress on the tissues of the body caused by ill health or trauma can put extra strain on the body's resources. They will produce more free radicals than normal which can cause additional damage. In humans, free radicals usually come in the form of the oxygen molecule which causes the oxidation process and this process damages the cells of your body. Free radicals are responsible for aging in general and, after injury, illness or surgery, can sometimes slow your recovery. Free radicals can't be eliminated as they are the natural by-products of many processes within and among cells, but they can be reduced.

The enemy of a free radical is an antioxidant. Antioxidant is the word given to several organic substances, including vitamins C and E, vitamin A, carotenoids and the mineral selenium. At the molecular and cellular levels, antioxidants deactivate free radicals.



A diet containing a wide range of foods, as unprocessed as possible, is the best for most convalescents. Fresh fruit and vegetables and unrefined grains will provide a good source of the vitamins you

need. The mineral selenium can be found in Brazil nuts, wheatgerm, sunflower seeds, whole-wheat bread and dairy foods, while meat, oysters, fish (especially herring) and liver are good sources of zinc (which is an important mineral in tissue repair).

Seek medical attention

Call your doctor if any of the following danger signals occur:

- Falls
- Periods of confusion
- Severe dizziness when standing up
- Recurrence of the symptoms already dealt with
- New symptoms such as fever, breathlessness, joint pain or chest pain
- Activities of daily living, such as preparing meals, become a struggle
- Severe depression.