

How can Osteopathy help?

The first thing to accept is that ligaments take around six weeks to ease. Initially Osteopathy can sort any mechanical reasons why the ligament may have strained by easing restrictions in the joints and muscles above, around or below the strained ligament. Direct treatment to the strained ligament at this stage maybe to painful but treatment helps take as much pressure as possible off the strained ligament and allows the loosened joints and muscles around the strained ligament to do a little bit more of the work.

Heat is often helpful. I find heat often brings more relief than cold, even in the initial acute inflammatory stage. Muscles like the warmth, heat eases the ache. Either warm hot water bottles, wheat bags or heat patches can help. Try not to let them get cold!

It is also important to try and maintain movement in the affected joints. Osteopathy treatment can ease the muscle pain and maintain joint mobility, as the ligament heals. Gentle mobility exercises can be shown to maintain and improve joint mobility at and around the injured area to help the ligament heal properly.

As symptoms improve, often around 2 weeks, patients can gradually increase movement and exercises, perhaps introduce longer walks, swimming or cycling for longer periods of time. The muscles are still tight and protective so still respond to heat and gentle stretches. These can be continued over the next 4 weeks.

Up until 6 weeks, it is to early for strengthening exercises. The muscles are tight, they are not relaxed and working hard, they can't be strengthened until the ligament has recovered and the muscles relax. This is the time to start Physiotherapy, Yoga or Pilates to increase core strength.



Established in it's present location in Shaw, Newbury and in the Hungerford doctors surgery in the Croft since 1994.

The clinic has operated in the Newbury and Hungerford area since 1990.

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Osteopathy

Ligament strains



Dr Andrew Taylor Still

Osteopathy was developed by an American doctor, Andrew Taylor Still in 1873. He noticed people with traditional medical complaints often presented with structural problems in their spinal joints. He developed mechanical 'techniques' to manually treat these complaints and ease their symptoms rather than relying solely on traditional medicine. He believed a person's body, mind and spirit was connected and interacted as a unit. He believed the structure of the body governed its function and the function governed its structure and that each person has inherent healing potential through their immune system to heal themselves.

Osteopathy came to Britain in 1913, when one of Still's early students, John Martin Littlejohn, returned to London to practice and with the aim of setting up an Osteopathic school. The British School of Osteopathy opened in 1917 but Osteopathy did not become properly regulated until 1993 under the Osteopathy act and the formation of the General Osteopathic Council, its governing body.

What is an Osteopath?

An Osteopath is often associated with treating bad backs and necks and associated with 'clicking joints'. 80% of patients who first present at the clinic present with neck and low back problems often as a last resort, having exhausted the conventional medical approaches.

Patients often ask and are often surprised to find out Osteopaths can treat complaints in hips, knees, ankles and feet, shoulders, elbows, wrists, hands and heads.

Osteopathy can be very gentle. 'Clicking joints' can be a useful tool when required and appropriate but there are many ways of easing restricted joints, ligaments, tendons and muscles and patients are often surprised how gentle and effective treatment can be and often how quickly some symptoms can improve.

The key to Osteopathic treatment is finding the cause! Bodies are very good at compensating around problems and imbalances, many restrictions can build up over a long time, from previous accidents, poor posture or habitual activity but the body bends and twists to compensate and carries on, moving as best it can, adapting to these restrictions until something finally finishes it off and it can't cope any more.

Osteopathic treatment eases these restrictions, restores the compensation and allows the body to do what it wants to do naturally and get itself better through its immune system. If you allow it an inch it will take a mile and get better on its own. Whether it requires easing joints with manipulation and 'clicks' at one end of the spectrum or a more gentle release to ease restriction with the subtle cranial sacral approach at the other extreme.

Ligament strains

Perhaps the most frequent cause of neck, mid and low back pain. Ligaments are tough, fibrous structures that hold the bones together, or even more likely, apart. They surround the joint, and control the joint's range of movement, limiting the movement a joint can do. They are in turn supported and surrounded by muscles which act as levers to move the joints.

Reasonably sudden in onset and often as a result of restrictions in joints above, around or below the strained joint. Once strained, pain and inflammation increases around 7 to 8 hours after injury or even overnight, patients often waking with pain and stiffness the following morning when they try and get out of bed. Ligament strains can be accompanied with muscle spasm. Spasm is your 'friend'. It is painful, but it protects the ligament and joint from further injury. If you move the joint to a position where it hurts, the muscles will spasm to protect the joint from further injury. Spasm is like an emergency brake to protect the damaged ligament.

Ligaments strains are often recurrent or persist until the surrounding restrictions are sorted with treatment. Acute ligament pain can start to ease over a period of 3 to 4 days, as the inflammation eases, the pain moves from an acute severe pain with spasm to more of an ache over the next 10 to 14 days.

Movement starts to get easier and the ache continues to release and improve to more of a stiff muscle tightness. This can persist, improving slowly and gradually for the next 3 to 4 weeks. Ligaments can take up to six weeks to repair in total. Depending on what you do, you still have to be careful, ligaments can easily be aggravated during this time, a little like removing a scab from a healing cut and you can set yourself back to the start again!

Ligaments prefer movement, ease with movement and don't like sitting or resting. They are generally stiffer in the mornings until you get yourself going.

Other than mobility exercises to keep the joints mobile and heat treatment to help the muscle ache, there is little point starting a full rehabilitation program before this time.

Recovery

By six weeks, the ligament should be healed, movement should be pain free and any stiffness eases quickly. This is the time to gently start rehabilitation to improve joint movement strengthen the muscles around them.

How can I help get better ?

Over the last 30 years, modern medicine has moved away from resting patients with bad backs on a hard boards for weeks on end and putting them in plaster casts to recommending mobility and strengthening exercises for recovery. Sheets of exercises given by G.P.s often include stretching and strengthening exercises for muscles along side mobility exercises. There is still a big difference between recommending exercise to recommending movement. Movement is important. You do not want the ligament to heal up and tighten as a solid lump of scar tissue.

Modern thinking is moving towards ligaments holding joints apart rather than together, a little like acro -props holding up an unsupported ceiling. If you remove the prop, the ceiling collapses. Ligaments act in a similar way. A strained ligament is weak and does not support the joint properly. Muscles tighten around the weakened ligament to support and stabilise the joint. This is why they like heat. Heat flushes the blood through, removing lactic acids that trigger that dull achey pain. Whilst muscle are tight and protective they do not relax, and can't be strengthened or stretched meaningfully at this time. Over exercising the ligaments at this stage can lead to further damage in the joint and lead to problems in the future. Once the ligament has repaired and is functioning properly supporting the joint, the muscles relax and the joint is stable. This is the time to start stretching and strengthening exercises, getting back to your chosen sport and back in the gym. Not before.

Build up slowly and carefully.