

## **As the Twig is bent – so does the Tree incline**

By Caroline Penn DO MSc MSCC AHII

This old osteopathic saying reminds us that little problems in the infant's structure may lead to bigger problems when they are fully-grown. That's why at The Penn Clinic we offer free checks for all little 'Twiglets' to straighten out the undesirable bent and squashed parts! This preventative check is appropriate even when there are no apparent problems.

Newborn babies are very soft and flexible. Even so they naturally retain their in-utero body shape for a week or two after birth, showing how their body and limbs were curled up before birth into the so-called foetal position.

The softest and most moved body parts (arms and legs) usually uncurl quite quickly, but deeper, more dense body tissues do not necessarily give up their bent or squashed shape so easily.

This is sometimes shows itself when a baby cannot turn it's head fully in both directions. Breast-feeding mothers then report that baby feeds better to one side. However, sometimes these residual areas of tightness go unnoticed and later manifest as a problem.

A good example of this occurs quite commonly in the infant's pelvis. Where one side is tight it may not show at first, unless they kick in a very lop-sided manner. Later, when the toddler starts to walk, one foot seems to turn in. In fact it is not the foot, but often the hip which is turning in and osteopathic treatment would be directed at restoring normal movement to the hip will allow the leg and foot to align correctly.

Look at the shape of your baby's head. The bony plates are designed to overlap and thereby ease the passage through the birth canal. Immediately after birth the baby's head can appear misshapen, but much of any distortion miraculously disappears within 24-48 hours. However, sometimes the underside of the head still holds quite an asymmetry and this can be seen for example, when one ear is more forward than the other. There is plenty of room for the brain and soft tissue inside even when the baby's skull is distorted, however, the tiny apertures in the skull that allow the nerves and vessels to pass through can be pinched. This is thought to be why babies with a variety of problems respond to osteopathy. These problems include snuffly noses, sticky eyes, colic, glue ear, suckling difficulties and even constipation.

It is now illegal to call yourself an osteopath unless you have undergone a full course of training which takes four years of full time study. At the Penn Clinic we treat all ages from birth through to adults, but some osteopaths don't treat infants so do check before making an appointment.

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