

Benefits of Manual Osteopathic Treatment for Prenatal and Postnatal Mothers

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A women's body undergoes several changes during pregnancy as well as during the recovery process. Manual Osteopathic Treatment can be a viable option for expectant mothers and for recent mothers who are looking for way to have a more comfortable pregnancy, delivery, and recovery. Studies have shown that pregnant women can receive exceptional treatment through Manual Osteopathic Treatment as well has reduced time and discomfort during delivery. Manual Osteopathy can also promote significant healing during the postpartum phase of the process. This is a wonderful time in the life of a woman and she should be able to enjoy to the fullest extent.

Manual osteopathic treatment during pregnancy can help expectant mothers adjust to the changes their bodies goes through, and can be very useful in treating the numerous side effects that are suffered by expectant mothers. These include, but are not limited to, nausea, back pain, numbness, low energy, loss of mobility, loss of sleep, and general discomfort. Continued treatments throughout the course of pregnancy can promote a more pleasant overall experience, as well as potentially lessen the strain and duration of childbirth itself. More specifically, osteopathic treatment can help relieve the aches and pains of pregnancy by eliminating somatic dysfunction and maintaining proper structure. Receiving follow up osteopathic treatment during the postnatal phase can increase a mother's recovery.

Osteopathic Manual Treatment (OMT) consists of a variety of manual techniques using hands-on palpation, stretching, gentle pressure and resistance. Through manipulation and massage of the bones, joints and muscles, OMT aims to restore proper function back to the body. Due to the nature of OMT, it can be a beneficial form of therapy in helping women during a time in which their bodies are undergoing significant stress and structural change.

In 1911 a study was done by Whiting where 223 pregnant women received prenatal OMT (Osteopathic Manual Treatment). In this study it shows a significant reduction in the labor time of women who received OMT versus women who did not received OMT during the prenatal phase. The study showed an average difference of 11 hours and 12 minutes of labor between women who received OMT and those who didn't.

In a study conducted by the University of North Texas Health Science Center between 2007 and 2011 examined 400 pregnant women between the ages of 18 and 35. The 400 women were divided into 3 separate groups; 136 received OMT (Osteopathic Manual Treatment), 131 women received PUT (Placebo Ultrasound Treatment), and a third group of 133 women received UCO or Usual Care Only. During the clinical study pregnant women who received Osteopathic Manual Treatment showed significant pain reduction.

This study also showed that OMT was effective in reducing labor time and difficulty.

An example of another study was performed in 1911 by Whiting. Using a study involving 223 expectant mothers the time it took for the delivery with those mothers who received OMT and those who did not was documented. Whiting found that for first time pregnant women who had received OMT the average labor time was much less, with an average of 9 hours and 54 minutes, in comparison to those that did not, and had an average labor time of 21 hours and 6 minutes. The same type of results remained true for the mothers that had delivered multiple children.

Results of another study by King in 2003 supports the theory that prenatal OMT may reduce the occurrence of some complications of pregnancy, labor, and delivery. The level of significance in the study was also remarkable given that the average age of women in the group that received OMT was significantly higher than the group that did not receive OMT.

From these studies we see that Osteopathic Treatment can make a substantial difference in the life of a woman preparing to give birth and even assist in the birthing process to reduce the pain and the time that the mother has to endure labor.

After a mother has given birth her body will immediately begin to recover and repair the damage that the pregnancy did to her system. During this process the mother's body is working to correct any dysfunction that may have occurred within the entire system. By receiving OMT during this postnatal phase the body can be guided to recover in the proper way instead of finding the path of least resistance to find recovery. When OMT is employed during this time there are several ways it can support the healthy recovery of a new mother.

During the pregnancy a mother's body will go through significant changes. These changes affect all the systems in the mother's body. Specifically, the pelvis and surrounding regions are completely changed for the purpose of carrying a child.

When a woman is carrying a child a few of the changes and issues she may have are: Sciatica, postural changes, nerve impingement, displacement of Sacrum-Pubes-Lumbar Spine, SI joint dysfunction, Lordosis, knee pain, neck pain, difficulty breathing, digestive issues, etc. There are several issues that an expecting mother will come across.

By week 10 the hormone relaxin is produced and causes the ligaments in the sacroiliac joints and the pubis symphysis to soften and stretch. This process also affects the lumbar spine and the vertebral discs in the area. As the ligaments soften the structural support is compromised and can start manifesting as pain or discomfort.

After the child has been delivered the body is now in need of repairing. The whole pelvis, pelvic floor, and the abdominal area are rearranged and in disarray. While the Relaxin continues in the body for up to 5 months the affects can be less than ideal. While the ligaments start to heal and contract and the structure of the pelvis is not in homeostasis. Through OMT a practitioner can assist in the process of mobilizing and healing the patient so the new mother can heal the way her body was intended to. By assisting in this process the practitioner can alleviate pain and discomfort in the surrounding areas.

Dr. Paul G Kleman, when discussing studies regarding the effects of Osteopathic Treatment of pregnant patients comes to this conclusion; "Osteopathic physicians must not forget postnatal care and the use of OMT. We must not forget that the woman's pelvic structures are rearranged by the passage of a new 6-lb to 9- lb. human being passed through over a period of hours. Structure needs to be normalized as function may return to normal."

Recently a study was done by King and associates to evaluate previous studies done on OMT and its effects on pregnancy, labor, and recovery. The study produced information regarding

postnatal care for mothers after the birth. The results were brief but profound. The study shows that the findings suggest that prenatal OMT treatments improve postnatal outcomes.

Published in The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association in July of 2015 studies conducted specifically on 80 women who had consistent low back pain for at least 3 months after giving birth. These participants were not allowed to receive any other form of treatment including medication, physical therapy, or any other pain relief. The trial went for a duration of 8 weeks with treatment only being given once every 2 weeks for a total of 4 treatments. During the trial period the women who received OMT reported significant relief after receiving OMT only 4 times over an 8-week period.

Jennifer Caudle, DO, assistant professor of family medicine at Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine said regarding this study, “Women who’ve recently given birth are rarely studied beyond screening for postpartum depression and delivery complications, even though it’s well documented that low back pain is a common issue that hinders their quality of life during an already stressful time. This study shows that osteopathic manipulative therapy can relieve their pain without medication that could be passed to a breastfeeding infant.”

In a study by O’Connell he showed that 39% of women in a group of 347 who had given birth one or more times developed symptoms of disc protrusion. In a subsequent study Kelsey shows that the disc injury is related to the actual pregnancy and not to postpartum child care.

Areas of OMT that would be therapeutic for a postnatal woman to receive would include: Joint mobilization, soft tissue therapy, postural exercises and strengthening exercises, Still technique, visceral therapy, etc.

By using manual osteopathic treatment with an expectant mother throughout the pregnancy can alleviate much of the discomfort pregnancy can cause. This will also provide much needed support and increased productivity through the labor and delivery process by allowing the body to respond promptly to the contractions therefore speeding up the delivery process. By continuing manual osteopathy sessions after the delivery of the baby a manual osteopathic practitioner can facilitate healing and help in the healthy recovery of the mother that will allow her to enjoy the new infant and to get back to physical health so she can enjoy a pain free life.

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