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Ear Infections - An Osteopathic Approach

excerpted from *Osteopathic Treatment and Ear Infections*, by Margaret Sorrel, DO, FCA

Ear infections are the cause of more pediatric doctor visits in the first three years of life than any other medical problem. One child in three develops chronic fluid accumulation in the middle ear making the child prone to recurrent ear infections, and potentially causing minor hearing loss. There are many reasons for the prevalence of this medical problem. Due to the immaturity of their immune systems, young children have frequent colds, and ear infections can follow as a complication. Some previously healthy children begin to have ear infections when undergoing orthodontic correction. Some children have dairy or other nutritional sensitivities which contribute to the frequency or severity of infections. The most common predisposing factor, however, is early childhood trauma to the head, occurring either in the birth process or in early childhood injuries. Even C-section babies can be affected.

How can Osteopathy help?

The osteopathic approach is to correct the cranial restrictions which are causing fluid retention and impeding fluid drainage. When the structural restrictions caused by these traumas are resolved, the vast majority of children have a significantly reduced incidence of infection and a noticeable improvement in hearing.

As the temporal bones of the cranium move in a normal manner, they assist the drainage of fluid through the Eustachian tubes to the back of the throat. Osteopathic manipulative techniques can restore normal motion of the temporal bones as well as the whole cranium mechanism, and thus improve fluid drainage from the middle ear. If fluid is not present, ear

infections are rare. Manipulative treatment also facilitates lymphatic drainage in the neck and chest and can improve arterial blood supply and venous drainage. Through assisting the immune system in this way, the improved overall health of the body also helps prevent future infections.

How much treatment is needed?

Children who suffer from recurrent ear infections often require weekly osteopathic treatment for a period of four to eight weeks. The duration and specific types of treatment offered vary with the individual child. Follow-up treatment on a periodic basis is essential to maintaining appropriate motion of the cranial mechanism and, therefore, the benefit of treatment. Osteopathic manipulative treatment addresses what is for many children the underlying cause of chronic ear infections.

The treatment itself is a gently non-invasive form of hands-on manipulation. If children cry or complain while being treated it is rarely because of pain. More often it is because they don't want to be lying down. Most can be entertained successfully with songs, stories, or toys.

Dr. Margaret Sorrel, in practice since 1978, is past president and Fellow of The Cranial Academy, a Component Society of the American Academy of Osteopathy. She is involved in training osteopathic physicians in the management of pediatric patients and has lectured nationally and internationally. She limits her practice to the osteopathic treatment of children.

For a complete printing of *Osteopathic Treatment and Ear Infections*, contact Dr. Sorrel at 521 19th Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98112. Phone (206) 328-7435.