

When you hear that osteopathy can cure you of everything from digestive and respiratory problems to headaches and insomnia, you could be excused for being a tad sceptical, especially if you are labouring under the (widely held) misconception that it's just a fancy kind of massage. But if osteopathy is a massage, it's a massage in overdrive – it involves soft-tissue stretching, deep tactile pressure and joint manipulation – and the initiated will tell you that it really is all it's cracked up to be.

Many osteopaths are fully qualified doctors, who have completed medical school. While there are only about 30 osteopaths currently practising in Hong Kong, osteopaths are recognised as primary-care providers overseas, and they work in conjunction with other health practitioners within the mainstream medical framework.

Treating the whole body

Osteopathy differs from conventional modern medicine, and indeed many forms of alternative medicine, because medication is not typically subscribed. One of the tenants of osteopathy is that the body has a self-healing mechanism, and it is first-and-foremost an alignment-based therapy. It's a musculoskeletal medicine, looking at the way the body moves, and it's a manual medicine, meaning practitioners treat clients with their hands.

Alternative or not, osteopathy is certainly holistic and complementary to other forms of therapy, since the anatomy is viewed as one interconnected unit and treatment involves the



Dr Aaron Anderson treating a patient at the Integrated Medicine Institute in DB North Plaza

HOLISTIC HEALING

Can alignment-based therapy eliminate the root cause of your pain? *Ray Robertson* consults Dr Aaron Anderson, IMI's Olympian-treating osteopath

whole body. (Osteopaths use manual-therapy techniques to realign structures in your body that may be contributing to illness, so don't be surprised if they treat your back pain by focusing on your feet.)

"An osteopath looks at how a patient's skeleton, joints, muscles, nerves, circulation, connective tissue and internal organs function together, and treats the root causes of pain and

imbalance," opens osteopath Dr Aaron Anderson of Integrated Medicine Institute (IMI) in DB North Plaza.

"The anatomy is in constant, rhythmic motion, and the human body works to maintain a state of balanced function. When blood and lymph flow freely, the tissues can perform their physiologic functions without impedance. But when tissues get twisted and compressed, the normal functions ▶

get obstructed, which is where an osteopath can help.

"Because all systems of the body interrelate, sometimes symptoms (pain) can be manifested far away from the cause of the actual problem. A sore knee can be the result of a hip injury; a painful neck can be due to compromised shoulder mechanics."

Calling all pilots

The majority of people who consult an osteopath do so because of neck or lower back pain, and this is certainly the case in DB, with people who spend long hours sitting in the same position – everyone from airline pilots to office workers – benefiting from regular treatments.

"Bad posture or a sedentary lifestyle puts stress on our bodies, leading to tension and pain, and osteopathy can help," says Aaron.

Regular flyers should note that osteopathic treatment can boost recovery after long-haul travel across time zones.

"Sitting for long periods, and especially in an environment like the airplane cabin that experiences pressure changes, can affect the gastro-intestinal system," explains Aaron. "The small intestines can drop putting undue pressure on the bladder, and constipation can result from this prolonged downward pressure on the organs. The effects of this may present as groin pain or outer hip pain.

"Long-haul travel can disrupt our body's production of serotonin, the

so-called 'happy' brain chemical that regulates our mood and sleep/wake cycle," Aaron adds. "To help regulate serotonin production, an osteopath can release visceral tension in the small intestines. Treating the high cervical spine and head venous sinus can also help."

Wellness for athletes

It's not just DB pilots who are turning on to osteopathy, sport enthusiasts of all levels look to it to keep their bodies in optimum shape, and to heal existing conditions.

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Osteopaths can help with injury prevention and management; rehabilitation and treatment of common sporting injuries, such as muscle and ligament strains; shin splints; knee and hip pain; shoulder, elbow and wrist pain and recurring musculoskeletal injuries.

"In sport, osteopathy is often used as a preventive measure to keep the body in optimum condition and to reduce the risk of injury in the future," says Aaron, who treated Australia's silver medal-winning

Men's Pursuit Cycling team prior to the 2016 Olympic Games.

"My role was to treat the cyclists for strains and also assist if they crashed," Aaron says. "During the training camp, I was employed to perform drainage techniques on their muscles (removing lactic acid) and to help them recover for the next session.

"The aim of osteopathic treatment is to accelerate your injury healing time, relieve pain and identify any other problem areas within your body that may be contributing to your injury. Osteopathy identifies problems relating to the muscles, bones and tissues; this broad approach helps to identify wider issues, which can contribute to localised pain or specific complaints."

In DB, Aaron sees a lot of injuries related to long-distance trail running and cycling, and he treats a multitude of complaints including inflamed tendons, shin splints, torn hamstrings and sprained ankles. Osteopathy can reduce swelling, stretch and condition muscles and ease pain. It can also ease repetitive strain injuries, such as tennis elbow, that are caused by prolonged strain on a particular muscle or tendon.

"Alleviation of the symptoms of injuries like shin splints or tennis elbow are often evident after just a few sessions," Aaron says. "Post treatment, I may recommend specific exercises to do at home. Adopting a regular stretching routine strengthens muscles and helps to prevent issues recurring." **D**

Dr Aaron Anderson provides osteopathic treatment alongside Jonathan Vallade and Jodi Waugh at the Integrated Medicine Institute in DB North Plaza. For more information or to book an appointment, call 2537 1087.

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