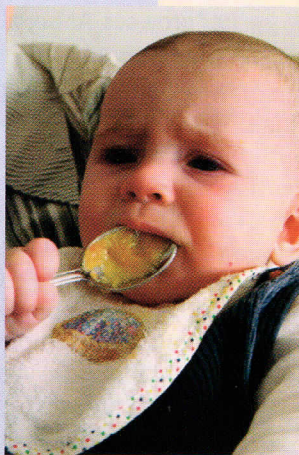


Easy to Swallow

Osteopathy and Children's Digestion

by Tamara McReynolds

Tamara McReynolds, D.O., is board certified in Neuromusculoskeletal Medicine/Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine and Emergency Medicine. She has a holistic private practice and specializes in Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine, Spiritual Medicine, and Cleansing and Detoxification. Call (512) 863-4722 or visit www.drmmcreynolds.com.



Kids and Digestion

Infants and children commonly have digestive problems just like adults. Symptoms can range from mild burping with spit-up, to reflux, constipation, or hours of crying due to colic. As the digestive system matures, many of these problems may lessen or resolve, but waiting for relief can be hard not only on the infant but also on Mom and Dad.

What does birth have to do with digestion?

Birth is one of the most stressful events of our lives. In order to fit through the birth canal, the soft bones of the skull overlap to reduce the size of the head and the body tissues are compressed, twisted, and stretched.

The back of the head (occiput) takes a lot of pressure during delivery. This is where the tongue nerve (hypoglossal) and vagus nerve (for digestion) pass through the skull and may become irritated. This irritation may cause impaired suckling or reflux.

After going through the canal, many babies are born with oddly shaped heads. In the first few days of life, as the baby feeds, yawns, and cries, the head will gradually lose the extreme mould shape. Sometimes however, this "unmoulding" process is incomplete and abnormal head strains remain.

Babies that are crying, screaming, and colicky may be uncomfortable due to a constant feeling of pressure in the head. When body tissues (fascia) are compressed, this puts pressure on nerves, blood vessels and lymphatic fluids, preventing normal function of digestion. In children this may result in vague, non-specific digestive complaints such as tummy aches, nausea and constipation.

How can Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT) help?

Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment, OMT, involves precise hands-on support of the neuromusculoskeletal system. Gentle osteopathic cranial techniques are used to ease head tensions and help the cerebrospinal fluid circulate more efficiently. When bony misalignment and tissue tensions affecting the digestive nerves are removed, a baby can better handle his feedings and gas. Corrective osteopathic treatment of abdominal fascia using visceral techniques helps to facilitate normal stomach motion and digestion.

Making Healthy Food Choices:

Making healthy dietary choices during infancy and childhood, when the body is developing, is a critical step in fostering optimal growth and establishing good eating habits. Breast feeding is the ideal way to feed infants during the first six months of life.

As the digestive tract matures, the spaces between the cells that allow the mother's immunoglobulins to be absorbed get tighter, reducing potential for food allergies. When introducing foods at six months, it's best to introduce one new food at a time. This allows time to watch for allergic responses, often seen in the form of digestive upset or skin rashes. It can take up to five days of eating a new food before a reaction is seen.

Here are a few suggestions for a healthy diet for infants and children:

- Wheat, dairy, eggs, citrus, strawberries, peanuts, tree nuts, fish/seafood, meat, and honey should be avoided until after twelve months.
- It's important to eat organic to avoid toxic effects of pesticides, insecticides, and artificial ripening agents.
- Always avoid processed foods and additives, especially high fructose corn syrup.
- As your child matures, a diet focused on fresh fruits and vegetables, beans, nuts, and whole grains will help maintain a healthy digestive system and promote overall health.

Common digestive problems in infants and children:

- Impaired suckling
- Impaired swallowing
- Taking a long time to feed
- Crying after eating (Irritability of the stomach and colon)
- Frequent spitting up or vomiting (Reflux)
- Colic
- Sleeplessness
- Nausea
- Tummy Aches
- Constipation

