

The importance of treating the viscera (organs)

One of the key tenets of osteopathy is that ‘the body is a unit’, i.e., the body is made of parts which relate to each other in various ways. The holistic nature of osteopathy can sometimes make it a mind-bogglingly complex discipline to practise, in that one has to consider everything as a possible source of dysfunction, however remote from the site of pain, and have the skills and knowledge to seek out the primary cause. This can be even more confusing for patients, who I’m sure often wonder why osteopaths don’t just focus their attention on the area of pain.

To give an example, restrictions of the organs in the abdominal, thoracic or pelvic cavities (they should all move freely against one against the other, despite being packed in quite tightly) have repercussions for the musculo-skeletal system (joints, muscles, ligaments) via connections in the connective tissue (fascia) that binds all the body’s structures together. Similarly, tightness in the ribs or diaphragm (often due to our not breathing properly) will have a major effect on the spine to which they connect (and likewise, the organs that the rib cage houses).

So do tell your osteopath if you have any abdominal symptoms, for example; they could be very important to your seemingly unrelated back pain. And don’t worry if your osteopath doesn’t go straight to the source of pain. Ida Rolf, the founder of “Rolfing” – a manual therapy approach involving deep tissue massage - once said in relation to the origin of pain “where you think it is, it ain’t”. They are words every manual therapist needs to remind themselves of from time to time.