

HEALTHY BODIES

As chiropractic, osteopathy and physiotherapy treatments grow in popularity, **Suzie Skipper** finds out from the experts how they can support your body during pregnancy, as a new Mum and when taking care of your bundle of joy.

Illustrations by **Charlotte Cleveland**.

WHICH TREATMENT?

All three treatments come under the term 'manual therapies' and the way care is provided is very similar. They all aim to improve physical health and well-being and are non-invasive and drug-free. There are, however, some differences.

Chiropractors base their care on the detection, correction and prevention of spinal dysfunction (subluxations i.e. when a vertebra is out of its normal position). They use specific spinal adjustments to improve and restore proper nervous system function and remove nerve interference to improve the body's overall health.

Osteopathy is a system of manual diagnosis and treatment to help re-establish the body's normal function. The philosophy of osteopathy is to treat the whole person, not only specific symptoms, using gentle manipulative techniques. Osteopathic treatment may help to alleviate pain from injury and chronic conditions, as well as from joint, muscular and skeletal imbalances of the body.

Physiotherapy can involve a number of different treatments and preventative approaches, including manual therapy, movement, exercise and advice depending on the specific problem. They will often employ an approach described as 'bio-psycho-social' meaning that treatment is directed to the person as a whole.

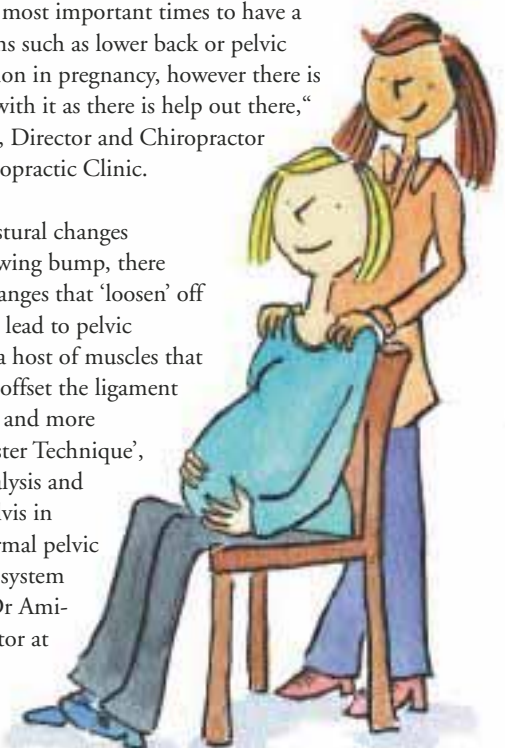
PREGNANCY

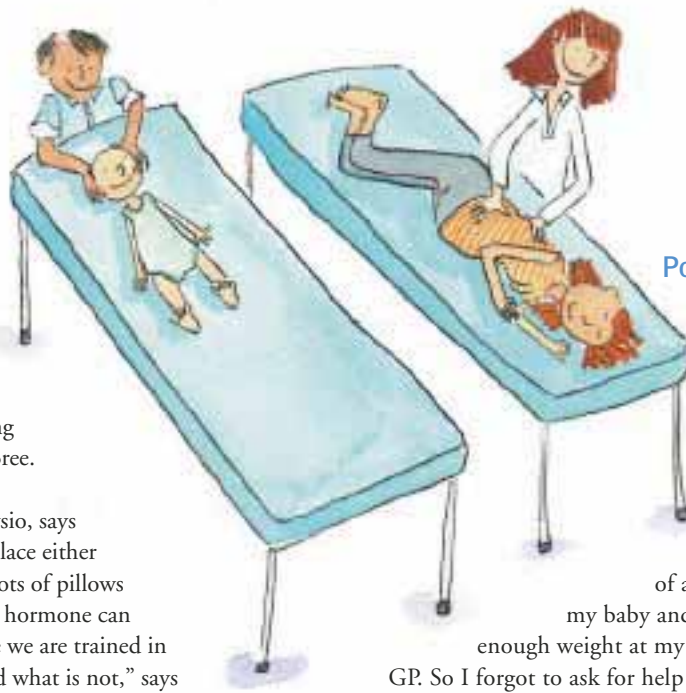
A huge amount happens to a woman's body in a short amount of time during pregnancy. Therefore, it is no surprise that this is perhaps one of the most important times to have a treatment. "Symptoms such as lower back or pelvic girdle pain are common in pregnancy, however there is no reason to put up with it as there is help out there," says Stephen Hughes, Director and Chiropractor at The Octagon Chiropractic Clinic.

📧 octagonclinic.co.uk

Besides various postural changes associated with a growing bump, there are also hormonal changes that 'loosen' off ligaments, which can lead to pelvic instability, as well as a host of muscles that must work harder to offset the ligament laxity. "Chiropractic, and more specifically the 'Webster Technique', is a specific sacral analysis and adjustment of the pelvis in order to facilitate normal pelvic alignment and nerve system function," explains Dr Ami-Bree Said, Chiropractor at Chiro London.

📧 chiro.london





Is it safe?

Having a treatment by a qualified practitioner is perfectly safe, even during the first trimester. “Whoever you see will go through a thorough history and examination before beginning gentle and specific care,” explains Ami-Bree.

Physiotherapist Georgie Adams, who specialises in Women’s Health at Six Physio, says that pregnancy treatment usually takes place either seated or lying down on your side with lots of pillows for support. “Joint pain from the relaxin hormone can start as early as 12-14 weeks and because we are trained in that area, we know what is safe to do and what is not,” says Georgie. sixphysio.com

Specialist Women’s & Men’s Health Physiotherapist, Katie Jeitz, at Central Health Physiotherapy, says it is much easier to help women if they attend earlier in pregnancy. “If women come in to see us when they are lighter, it is easier to start a good pelvic floor training programme and correct any postural habits such as an increased lower back arch which can worsen as you get heavier.”

central-health.com

Ready for labour

Seeing a physio before birth can help with getting ready for labour, says Georgie. “We can assist with helping women find good positions for labour and show them how to do perineal massage, to help the perineum stretch more easily during labour which might reduce the chances of a tear or an episiotomy,” says Georgie.

POST-BIRTH

Birthing a baby demonstrates just how phenomenal the female body is! Your body takes its time to change throughout pregnancy. Then, seemingly ‘overnight’, your weight distribution changes and you are no longer ‘front heavy’. Also, all of your activities of daily living change to looking down, feeding, and holding your beautiful baby. “That centre of gravity shift, and continuous hunched posture, coupled with the relaxin, can be a lot for your neurology to adapt to, and I often find mothers’ discomfort shift to their upper back and neck,” says Ami-Bree.

Time for you

Taking time out to look after yourself after having had a baby is such a good thing to do, not only physically but also mentally. I remember having a massage a few weeks after having my son and it was absolute bliss to feel like I was giving back to my body after carrying my precious baby for 9 months, not to mention the hour or so spent on my own!

“It’s normal to worry about the baby but babies are usually fine; it’s often the mums who will need some treatment after 9 months of pregnancy and then breast feeding and lifting the baby,” says Stephen.

Postnatal check

Unfortunately, checking whether your tummy has any gapping i.e. rectus abdominis diastasis, and whether your pelvic floor has recovered from pregnancy and birth is often overlooked. “I was too tired to really think

of anything else other than my baby and whether she was gaining enough weight at my 6-week check with the

GP. So I forgot to ask for help with checking my tummy muscles,” says Sarah, mum of two.

It is such a good idea to have a postnatal check. “We will check the tummy and pelvic muscles for new mums as well as their hips and backs and start them on a gentle strengthening programme,” says Georgie. Your pelvic floor can be weak even if you have had a C-section. “Sometimes going back to the gym and doing the wrong exercise can widen the diastasis rectus; as a new mum it’s so important to be shown exactly which exercises you should be doing,” explains Georgie.

Issues with pelvic floor dysfunction can lead to a prolapse so it is very important to catch it early, says Katie. “We advise on different gadgets to help with the pelvic floor exercises, including electrical stimulation devices.”

Scars can also be an issue for some women, as sometimes they do not heal nicely. “Obviously, you shouldn’t touch scars (C-section or perineum) while they are healing but once healed it is good to massage them. Occasionally, we use ultrasound therapy on stubborn, painful scars,” adds Katie. Do remember though, it takes about 6 months to recover from pregnancy and birth.

BABIES

As a mum of four, I know babies can be very different. My second child was very unsettled until about 3 months and had difficulty feeding, while my third amazingly slept through the night from about 6 weeks. Being a mum – whether it is the first or fourth time – comes with lots of challenges, insecurities and sleepless nights! “All these feelings are natural, but if you are in a situation where you are not sure what to do, especially if your baby is unsettled, there is plenty of help out there, including seeking the help of a professional,” says Dr Ioná Bramati-Castellari, Osteopath & Naturopath at IBC Care.

ibccare.co.uk

“Everyone worries about the baby during the birth process, especially if it is a long labour, but mothers and babies are adapted for birth, even though it may not feel like it at the time!” explains Stephen. “We look to see if the baby has any tension or slight restriction in his or





her muscles that might affect its ability to turn its head or open its mouth to feed properly,” says Stephen, adding that on babies they use an extremely gentle, unwinding technique.

WHAT IS CRANIAL OSTEOPATHY?

Many mums rave about taking their babies to see a cranial osteopath for colic, poor feeding or just generally being unsettled. But what exactly is it? “Gentle touch is applied to the baby’s head and body, enabling the inherent ability of the body to release stresses and balance itself,” explains Ioná.

At the start of your first appointment, the osteopath will ask you questions about your baby’s medical history and any symptoms you have noticed. They will also ask about the pregnancy, delivery and information about both parents’ health and family history. “This will help the osteopath make an accurate diagnosis and suggest appropriate treatment.”

The baby’s position in the uterus can reflect on compressive forces through the baby’s body that in turn can potentially lead into certain strains. “For example, if your baby was lying in a breach position during pregnancy it may influence the positioning of the hips after birth. If forceps were used during delivery this may put compressive forces on the baby’s skull which in turn may influence the mechanics of the sinus’ drainage and ear canal,” explains Ioná.

Your osteopath will then assess your baby’s reflexes, joint movements, muscular tone, head positioning and feeding. Once a diagnosis has been reached, the osteopath may recommend cranial treatment or a referral to your GP/Health Visitor. It is important to note that not all osteopaths are trained in paediatric care, which requires a post-graduate qualification in paediatric osteopathy.

GOOD TO KNOW

Having a recommendation is always a good starting point. Check whether your therapist has the relevant qualifications and is registered to practice in the UK.

General Chiropractic Council gcc-uk.org

The British Chiropractic Association chiropractic-uk.co.uk

International Chiropractic Paediatric Association with information on the Webster Technique. icpa4kids.com

The General Osteopathic Council osteopathy.org.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy csp.org.uk

Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy, a professional network affiliated with the CSP with lots of advice and booklets. pogp.csp.org.uk

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