Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT)

Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT) is a skill set used by Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DO). Using this helps detect and treat somatic dysfunctions throughout the body. Osteopathy is based on the belief that structure and function are connected. Changes in the body's structure (somatic dysfunctions) can affect how the body functions.

Somatic dysfunctions can be the result of everyday stressors on the body. In infants, this is often a result of their movement during birth and/or pregnancy. These dysfunctions can cause infants to have difficulty with feeding.

How it Works
An infant's skull is not yet fused. This allows for significant motion of the skull bones and helps the baby to pass through the birth canal.

Type of Cranial Nerves
Multiple cranial nerves (CN) pass through a hole in the base of the skull. These nerves are vital for eating and drinking.

- **CN 9** is required for swallowing. It provides sensation to the palate. Dysfunction of this nerve can lead to excessive gag reflex.
- **CN 10** provides motor innervation to the palate and pharynx.
- **CN 11** is involved in the infant's ability to rotate her head.
- **CN 12** controls the tongue's movement. It is important in the infant's ability to suckle.
- **CN 5 and 7** exit the skull at other locations. They control the facial muscles which help to chew. CN 7 also allows for taste.

Nerve Function
Cranial nerves don't function as well when compressed by the skull. For example, if you compress the nerve running through your elbow, your hand becomes numb and tingly. When the skull presses on the nerves, it affects the function. This can be caused by minor shifts in the skull bones during birth and/or other daily stresses.

Osteopathic doctors are trained to detect these issues in the skull bones. They look at other areas of the body that directly connect to and impact motion of the skull.

During Treatment
DOs have a variety of techniques to choose from. Everything that is used for infants is very gentle. They use very slight movements and gentle pressure that cause changes. These are often not visible but are obvious to trained hands.

Treatment frees restrictions that improves overall function of nerves, blood vessels, and lymphatic drainage. The overall effect is improved blood flow to vital organs. The nervous system also transitions into a state of rest.

After Treatment

- Your baby may feel tired after OMT.
- Your baby may have large bowel movements.
- Make sure your baby has plenty of fluids. Follow their regular feeding routine.

Length of Treatment

The length of treatment varies. Some infants need only one session. This is often the case when treatment is started earlier in life, such as in the nursery.

Some infants will require more treatments. More treatments are often needed when the patient is older and has had more time to reinforce maladaptive strain patterns.

Your care team will advise the length of treatment after your baby's first treatment session.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8440