

# Living Sculptures

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As osteopaths we can seem to be excessively nosy about our patient's lives, past and present. The reason is that in order to understand current complaints we need to get a clear picture of any life experiences which may have affected the individual's health.

We are all moulded by the events in our lives physically, mentally and emotionally.

Obviously, some past events will leave a big imprint, such as after falling off a roof, while others, like banging an elbow on a door, will have only a temporary effect. The effects of a trauma will vary from one person to another. For example, the loss of a parent at 10 years old has different consequences to losing a parent at sixty and will, therefore, leave different emotional (and, possibly, physical) impressions on the people grieving.

Physical conditions will often have an emotional component; perhaps a fear of driving after being involved in a bad car accident or anxiety that a new painful symptom might be an indicator of serious disease.

These effects on our minds and bodies start before birth. The genes and health of the parents determines the health of a developing baby in the womb. We all know how rubella affects the foetus at a particular time of gestation and the thalidomide tragedy reminds us how sensitive to medication and chemicals a developing baby is. At the other extreme, even the stress of moving house while pregnant and the consequent raised adrenalin levels can sometimes leave a memory pattern on a newborn infant's body which can be felt by an experienced osteopath.

Birth itself can also leave a range of moulding effects on a baby. The plasticity of a newborn can be both a blessing and a curse. A very difficult and long delivery which has involved foetal distress and possibly required the use of forceps can leave a strain pattern on the infant skull. The baby's innate recovery potential may resolve this birth strain beautifully as he/she suckles, cries and moves. However, a particularly deep imprint on the baby's musculo-skeletal framework may result in a distorted growth pattern, the effects of which can remain in the adult and contribute to various health problems, such as sinusitis or headaches.

As a child grows and discovers the world there will be countless hurdles including heavy falls, infections and the ups and downs of peer group relationships. We bounce back from most of these events because our bodies strive towards health. However, if the physical or emotional force is too great or our resources too low (especially if a number of adverse events happen at once) then there is an increased chance of a memory being left in the connective tissues of the body.

Sometimes these tissue memories are the result of a sudden and acute incident but they can as

easily be caused by prolonged patterns of behaviour or emotional states. For example, a lack of self-confidence in a child who is a victim of constant unpleasant teasing can show itself in poor posture, with head down and shoulders drooping. This posture can become habitual causing imbalances in the muscles at the front and back of the body. Occupational postures are also responsible for moulding our bodies into particular shapes unless we take steps to counteract this. Desk workers and long distance drivers in particular should be wary of developing poor posture.



As we age it can be harder for us to recover from trauma, partly because our muscles, ligaments and bones become less pliable and may retain layers of the old tissue memory patterns. Whiplash injuries can leave an impression of shock through the spine. However, the occupants of a car may be affected differently depending on various factors including previous injuries or the presence of arthritis as well as their posture and where they are sitting in the car or their individual anxiety levels.

Throughout life, the way we respond physically and emotionally to the rough and tumble of illnesses, accidents, stress, and loss will determine how our body structures are moulded and sculpted to be what they are today. In order for osteopaths to help patients it is necessary to understand the history of what has happened to each individual. This information is then used during the treatment to help release any traumatised or restricted areas of the body and to encourage the wonderful self-healing potential to work freely.

Working osteopathically is like peeling the layers of skin off an onion. Initially treatment may remove only the top layer exposing other layers of deeper older trauma patterns. These in turn need to be recognised and addressed with the osteopath's 'thinking fingers' to bring about more lasting improvements to health.

