

Manipulative therapies may be a beneficial treatment for infantile colic

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A Cochrane review of studies into manipulative therapies for colic, by the University of Southampton, suggests that the treatment technique may be of some benefit.

Infantile colic is a distressing problem, characterised by excessive crying of infants and it is the most common complaint seen by physicians in the first 16 weeks of a child's life.

It is usually considered a benign disorder because the symptoms generally disappear by the age of five or six months. However, the degree of distress caused to parents and family life is such that physicians often feel the need to intervene. Some studies suggest that there are longer-lasting effects on the child, and estimates in 2001 put the cost to the NHS at over £65 million.

It has been suggested that certain gentle, low velocity manipulative techniques such as those used in osteopathy and chiropractic, might safely reduce the symptoms associated with infantile colic, specifically excessive crying time. However, the techniques have also been criticised by people who say there is no evidence that they have an effect on children and that they may be unsafe.

The systematic review, which is published today (12 December 2012) in the [Cochrane Library](#), assessed six randomised trials involving a total of 325 infants who received manipulative treatment or had been part of a [control group](#).

Five of the six studies measured the number of hours colicky babies cried each day and their results suggest that crying was reduced by an average of one hour and 12 minutes per day by this treatment, which was statistically significant.

However, in many of the studies parents knew whether their infant was receiving treatment or not, which means that some uncertainty remains about the strength of these conclusions.

The use of manipulative therapies did not result in a significantly greater number of parents reporting complete recovery from colic in the three studies for which this data was available.

Professor George Lewith, Professor of Health Research at the University of Southampton, comments: "The majority of the included trials indicate that the parents of infants receiving manipulative therapies reported fewer hours crying per day than parents whose infants did not. This difference is statistically significant and important for those families who experience this condition. These studies show that in this small sample there were no adverse effects from using these treatments.

"However, we recognise that the collection of studies in our review is small and prone to bias which means we cannot arrive at a definitive conclusion about the effectiveness of manipulative therapies for infantile colic.

"More research is needed in this area to further the debate, especially well blinded trials, which are very difficult to do in children so young. We hope the review published today will offer objective evidence and generate more discussion in this particular area. "

More information: Dobson D, Lucassen PLBJ, Miller JJ, Vlieger AM, Prescott P, Lewith G. Manipulative therapies for infantile colic. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2012, Issue 12. Art. No.: CD004796. [DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004796.pub2](#)

Provided by University of Southampton

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