

## Infant Reflux.

One of the most common reasons for babies under 6 months old requiring Cranial Osteopathy treatment at our clinic is Reflux. These babies can be very irritable and unsettled for long periods during the day and night. Cranial Osteopathy is one of a number of solutions to this problem. In my opinion, to treat this condition successfully requires a collaborative approach between the Cranial Osteopath, the GP and the Public Health Nurse.

[Reflux](#) is the term used to describe what happens when the contents of the stomach come back up into the throat or the mouth. The stomach contents are acidic and irritate the lining of the oesophagus in the same way as Heartburn affects adults. The oesophagus is the tube which connects the throat to the stomach. The breathing diaphragm is a muscle which separates the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity. Tension through the diaphragm influences the opening of the oesophageal sphincter (valve), thereby allowing the stomach contents to travel upwards into the oesophagus. This tension in the diaphragm may be as a result of a difficult or prolonged birth. Irritation to the nerves at the base of the skull that supply the digestive system can also be a factor.

Around 50% of all babies will get mild reflux but only a small percentage of these require treatment. Your baby may regurgitate a little milk after a feed or have hiccups. This is normal and as long as your baby is otherwise well and continues to gain weight, you don't need to worry.

In some cases however, the [regurgitation](#) may be more regular and larger in volume and your baby may be distressed by this. In other cases baby may not regurgitate at all but still have [reflux](#) symptoms. This is known as *Silent Reflux*. Silent reflux in infants is exactly the same as infant reflux minus the spitting up. When a baby refluxes silently, the stomach contents travel up the throat but the baby swallows it back down again before it actually comes out. This means the stomach acid irritates on the trip up the throat *and* on the trip back down. Silent reflux in infants is not as obvious because there is no actual spitting up, which makes it much harder to detect.

Both formula-fed and breastfed babies may be affected by Reflux. Symptoms include;

- Crying in pain
- Discomfort when feeding (arching, screaming, refusal, turning away)
- Fussiness
- Frequent vomiting or spitting up
- Foul breath (smells acidic)
- Poor sleep habits, frequent waking
- Hiccups and Swallowing
- Comfort feeding- constant feeding to alleviate pain
- Poor Weight gain

Treating Reflux requires the co-operation of the Cranial Osteopath, the GP and the Public Health Nurse. As a Cranial Osteopath, the treatment given involves reducing irritability to nerves at the base of the skull that supply the digestive tract and reducing tension in the breathing diaphragm. This decreases pressure on the oesophageal valve, allowing the stomach contents to remain in the stomach to be digested. Once the reflux has settled, the baby's sleeping pattern settles too. Occasionally babies may require an Antacid in their feeds as a short term treatment. I advise parents to see their GP for this. The Public Health Nurse will then monitor the weight gain of the baby as he/she improves.

In the meantime, and for milder cases, keeping your baby upright during and for at least 30 minutes after a feed can help to reduce reflux. The aim is to stay as still as possible, using the after feed time as quiet time. Gentle movements, perhaps being worn in a sling or being pushed in a buggy may work well, as long as the baby remains in an upright position. Some buggies or baby seats may have a deep cup and in these cases it is useful to place a folded blanket under the baby's back in order to keep the baby upright. Formula fed babies may require longer periods of settling, since formula is digested slower than breastmilk.

If you are ever concerned about your baby or if your baby is crying incessantly it is a good idea to have him/her checked over by your GP or Public Health Nurse.

[For more information on the benefits of Cranial Osteopathy please contact Frank Kelleher, Cranial Osteopath for Babies and Children at Touchstone Osteopathy at Blackrock Hall Primary Care Centre. Tel; 021 4231166 or Email; \[frank.kelleher@blackrockhall.ie\]\(mailto:frank.kelleher@blackrockhall.ie\)](#)