

Birth Trauma: The Most Common Cause of Developmental Delays

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<http://www.osteopathiccenter.org/birthtrauma.html>

In at least 80% of children with developmental delays, including attention deficits and autism, there is a history of traumatic birth. In each diagnosis there are manifestations of various aspects of cerebral dysfunction, which in simple terms mean that the brain is not functioning as efficiently as it should.

The brain is contained within the bony skull, which at the time of birth is designed to accept the temporary compression of the birth canal, and expand fully when the baby cries immediately after birth. The lower end of the central nervous system is located within the sacrum, the large bone forming the back of the pelvis. This, too, is designed to absorb the compressing forces of the contracting uterus, and then be restored by bodily movements after birth. The vertebral column protects the spinal cord connecting the head and the pelvis.

Problems of labor and delivery may compromise these structural areas and thus disturb the nervous system within, thus interfering with its physiological development. Any of the following could be problematic:

- False labor before real labor began
- Premature rupture or leakage of membranes
- Induction or acceleration of labor by use of medication
- Presentation of baby in other position than face down
- Very long (>18 hours) or very rapid (<3 hours) labor
- Epidural anesthetic
- Forceps or vacuum extraction
- Cord around the baby's neck one or more times
- Severe slowing of baby's heart
- Period of uterine inertia, i.e. contractions stopped or slowed
- Cesarean section delivery because of lack of progress

The condition of the newborn baby or infant can also provide evidence of the health of its nervous system. Signs of potential difficulty:

- Delay in sucking of more than 24-48 hrs.
- Vomiting or spitting up after feeding
- Arched back or throwing head back when held on mother's shoulder or lying on the side
- Asymmetrical motion of arms or legs
- Spells of inconsolable crying

Lack of sequence or missing stages in motor development going from: rolling over, crawling flat on floor, creeping on hand and knees, cruising around furniture, and walking at approximately one year. Any of these signs in the baby suggest that some areas of the central nervous system have been comprised. It is true that sucking may be established in a day or two or more, and that vomiting may stop in a month or two. The arching of the back and extension of the head may be less obvious when progression is made to standing and walking, but then toe-walking may be apparent.

Children of school age who manifest problems may already have been subject to a variety of medicinal interventions. They may also have perceptual dysfunction's that interfere with visual and auditory skills. These children are in dire need of structural treatment to restore the musculoskeletal integrity of the whole body.

A comprehensive osteopathic approach with precise, gentle, restorative manipulative therapy can help these children immeasurably. The general level of well-being, as well as neurological function, will significantly improve. Adjunct therapies, such as visual and auditory perceptual training, tutoring and a well-balanced diet of whole, natural foods, perhaps with carefully selected supplements, will then be far more effective.



Structural dysfunction resulting from birth trauma can be corrected early so that neurological development progresses satisfactorily. Then academic, behavioral and developmental problems can be averted by establishing or restoring optimal anatomic-physiologic integrity. Therapeutic measures can teach a child how to use the body efficiently. When you have your next baby, have an osteopathic physician evaluate and treat you, the mother, during pregnancy in order to reduce any possible complications during labor and then provide a thorough evaluation of your baby during the newborn period. This is the essence of prevention.