

## “Everybody at the hospital was focused on their own bit of my son – his spine, stomach or heart – and no one was considering him as a whole little person”

Jane Hughes on the benefits of paediatric osteopathy

**W**ithin a few hours of his first set of vaccinations at ten weeks, Luke Weston came out in red blotches and his temperature soared. Over the following days, he developed “wet” eczema in weeping patches over his body. He scratched himself so much that he began to bleed and his skin became infected. He was so irritated that he could only sleep in 15 to 20-minute stretches. Doctors prescribed antibiotics and steroid cream which helped to calm his skin, but the eczema refused to clear. One doctor told his worried parents, Brian and Christine, that lots of babies suffered from the same condition and he would eventually grow out of it.

Luke’s reaction to his second lot of injections was so severe that he didn’t recognise his parents for 24 hours. He was feverish and his eczema flared up again. All Brian and Christine could do was fan cool air over him. But even when his temperature fell, nothing seemed to help his skin. “His clothes were sticking to him and his head was covered in scabs,” says Christine. “We had to put little mittens on his

hands to stop him scratching, but he was angry, tearful and tired. We were at the end of our tether.”

By the age of four months, Luke had had four courses of antibiotics, so when a friend suggested they visit the Osteopathic Centre for Children in London, his parents were more than ready to try an alternative. As soon as the paediatric osteopath saw Luke, he asked Christine and Brian if they suffered from allergies. Between them, they had eczema, asthma and hay fever. The osteopath explained that Luke’s injections had triggered a genetic weakness, making him extremely sensitive and reactive.

The treatment he prescribed involved addressing Luke’s allergic symptoms of itchiness and irritation by calming down his nervous system. At the same time, the osteopath worked on improving the circulation to the skin so it could repair itself. That first session lasted 20 minutes and, to Luke’s parents, it seemed the osteopath was barely touching him. Yet Luke became visibly calmer.

Later treatments were shorter, sometimes only a minute or so, since once Luke’s body had found its own

healing momentum, the osteopath simply needed to check it was on track. To his parents’ relief, Luke slept better, stopped scratching, and within two months his skin had cleared.

As with other conditions, Luke’s treatment involved rebalancing the body through gentle manual techniques. What is distinctive about treating children, says the OCC’s senior consultant Susie Booth, is that their bones are still soft and their bodies have a strong drive towards normal function. Even the gentlest touch can elicit a powerful response, enabling the nervous, immune and circulatory systems to work more effectively.

Founded in 1991, the OCC now treats 30,000 children a year, with conditions ranging from Down’s syndrome to cerebral palsy, hyperactivity and asthma. Many patients are referred by health visitors and doctors, and demand is so high that the charity is to open a second centre in Manchester later in the year. Yet the

service it offers is totally reliant on voluntary donations.

For Sarah Dacre, whose two-year-old son, Louis, was born prematurely with heart and spinal problems, that service was an eye-opener. Sarah had pre-eclampsia during her pregnancy and Louis was born prematurely at 36 weeks. He weighed just 3lb and was

operated on within 24 hours of his birth. Three and a half weeks later, he was the youngest baby in the UK to have an arterial switch, but suffered a brain haemorrhage during the operation. While Sarah has the utmost admiration for the specialists who treated Louis, over the following months she began to feel something was missing. “Everybody was focused on their bit – his spine, stomach or heart – and no one was considering him as a whole little person,” she says.

“Louis seemed depressed. His diaphragm was tight, he was being



Babies’ bodies can be highly responsive to osteopathy

JANNINE WIEDEL/PHOTOLIBRARY

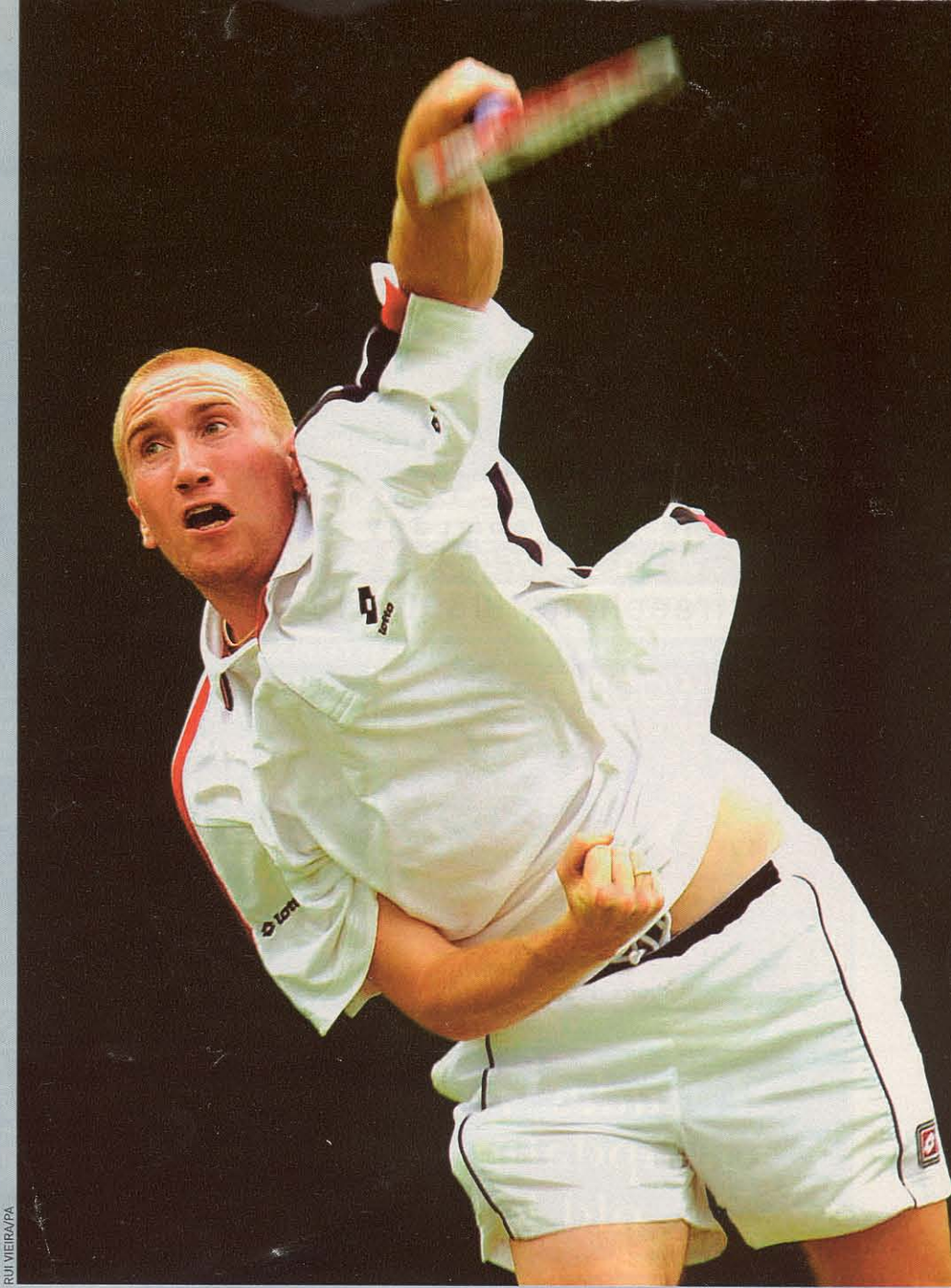
### PHOBIA OF THE WEEK: **CHOROPHOBIA**

The fear of dancing Particularly as practised by your parents

sick and lost a lot of weight." Like Louis's doctors, Sarah was initially sceptical about paediatric osteopathy. What convinced her was seeing how well her son responded to treatment. "He fought at first because he had a dreadful pressure sore and hated people touching his head. But then he calmed down, as though he suddenly realised it was making him feel better."

The degree of shock Louis experienced during his birth and operations, says Susie Booth, meant much of his body tissue had "locked up" and forgotten how to breathe. A year of intensive treatment helped to ease his tension, control his vomiting and ward off the worst of his infections. "It has made a fantastic difference to his ability to deal with his medical problems," says Sarah. "He still goes for maintenance sessions if he gets an infection but he is now a happy little boy, full of energy and enthusiasm and starting nursery school." ●

Donations to the Osteopathic Centre for Children's campaign to set up regional clinics can be sent to the OCC at 109 Harley Street, London W1G 6AN



RUI VIEIRA/PA

## REGIMEN

**Martin Lee, 24,  
tennis player**

**Weight: 12st 7lb  
Height: 6ft**

**Does playing tennis alone keep you fit?**

I play up to 35 tournaments a year, which helps me maintain a level of fitness. But it can be tough to stay at peak fitness on tour.

**When do you find time to train?**

For six days of the one week in four that I'm at home, I play four hours' tennis and spend 90 minutes doing weights and aerobic exercise.

**Which strokes do you work on?**

I practise the shots I hit most – ground strokes,

and serve and return. I play with someone of my own standard – that means a minimum serve of 110mph.

**Are you on a special diet?**

I try to eat healthily, but some days I slip up. What's good for you is what your body likes. I'll have a steak the night before a game for energy, and pasta two hours before a match.

**What about fluids on a match day at Wimbledon?**

I start drinking water as soon as I get up and, if it's very hot, sports drinks. I've seen a lot of players taken to hospital with dehydration

after matches.

**How does your weight affect your game?**

I try to stay below 13st. Heaviness slows me down. If I'm lighter I don't worry, as my body type is quite strong, so I don't lack power.

**What helps you to stay focused on court?**

Previously, if I won the first set I was already thinking about the next opponent, and that's a killer in any sport. It was 80 per cent mental that I wasn't going up the rankings. With the help of a sports psychologist I've learnt to focus on the game in hand.

**Is your McEnroe**

**syndrome under control?**

For a long time I used to get angry on court and smash about 25 rackets a season – it was a waste of energy and affected my next six games. Last year I broke just two.

**As Britain's number three can you better Henman's efforts at Wimbledon?**

Since I was young it has been my dream to win

Wimbledon. Last year I lost in the second round, but it was my first time on Centre Court. Now I'm starting to make the most of my talent, so you never know... ●

**Nicky Pietrangeli**

*Until July 13 Play Tennis offers free tennis at many UK clubs. For more information, call 020-7381 7038 or visit*

**5 MINUTE FIX**

**Red wine is a good cleanser for oily skin – apply on cotton wool, then wash in lukewarm water**