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KISS Syndrome

The head joint

Atlas - the first cervical vertebra, C1

Axis - the second cervical vertebra, C2

The **atlas** and the **axis**, the uppermost two cervical vertebrae, differ in their construction from the other cervical vertebrae. They are part of the flexible joint which connects the skull and the spine, and which is responsible for nodding and turning movements of the head.

The **atlas**, on which the head rests, has no vertebral body. It is named after the Greek god Atlas who, according to legend, carried the columns of the sky. The axis forms the pivot upon which the atlas rotates.

The atlas, the axis, the base of the skull and the surrounding soft parts (muscles, nerves, ligaments) together comprise the head joint.

This area represents an important reflex centre (the sixth sense organ), which is involved in spatial awareness and controls muscle tone in the body's postural muscles.

There are close connections between receptors in this area and certain parts of the brain (centres of sight, hearing and balance). This reflex centre is also responsible for sensing the position of the head relative to the body.

In brief, functions associated with the head joint region include:

- inducing sleep (via relaxation of the joint)
- contribution to movement and balance
- a connection with the vegetative (autonomic) centres of the brain
- a connection with the central processing areas of the brain.

What is KISS syndrome?

KISS (Kinematic Imbalances due to Suboccipital Strain) is not an "illness" as such, but instead a problem of motor control. Primary consequences of this are

- distorted neck
- deflection of the spine
- facial asymmetry and
- asymmetrical use of the extremities (arms and legs) .

Possible causes

- long and difficult births, needing forceps or a Ventouse suction cup
- emergency Caesarean section
- constrained intrauterine position
- breech presentation

- twin birth
- little intrauterine space
- infections
- planned Caesarian sections
- Kristeller's procedure during the birth
- very fast birth
- birthweight over 4000g (8lb 13oz)
- there also seems to be an element of familial tendency toward KISS syndrome

These are possible ways in which the delicate head joint could be pushed out of alignment, resulting in a physical asymmetry. This used to be called Atlas blockage, and was first described in 1953 by Dr. Gottfried Gutmann.

Around 8% of the total population is probably affected. Dr. Lutz Erik Koch estimates that out of 10% of people needing therapy, in fact less than 1% ever receives treatment.

He also believes that only every second paediatrician is aware of KISS syndrome. Parents are often appeased with the words "he/she will grow out of it". And it does really seem as if the neck distortion disappears after a while, even without treatment (either spontaneously, or with physiotherapy).

In reality, the baby learns how to compensate for its distorted position and to minimize associated pain. Some pull themselves up or start to walk particularly early, often to the joy of their parents. In reality they are making instinctive attempts to find a painless position. Particularly pronounced cases are known as a "wry neck".

In **adult life**, untreated patients can suffer from long-term consequences:

- problems with the cervical spine
- whiplash
- chronic back pain
- slipped disc
- tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- migraines
- problems with balance
- problems with movement
- dizziness