

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHIROPRACTIC

Can you believe it? Chiropractic medicine has been practiced since early Greece, China, Egypt and Japan! ¹ My own experience with chiropractic began when I was about 24 and was experiencing some low back pain. I went to see my boyfriend's MD who said that, "Your back is only as strong as you make it." That was it! No treatment, no exercises, no follow up. Luckily, a woman at the gym I frequented suggested I see a chiropractor. I did and, voila, the rest is history as they say, even resulting in my becoming one!

So what does chiropractic do to restore, maintain function and add to our supreme health? By adjusting the vertebrae which are not in alignment with each other. Since spinal vertebrae house the spinal cord, which sends out nerves to all the muscles and organs in our body, adjusting the segments of the spine will free up movement of those vertebrae and then free up the nerves to perform their function.

Sounds rather simple, yes? So if neuronal flow to all those structures is unimpeded, think of how much improved the function of those structures become. An added benefit of chiropractic adjusting is an increased lymph flow which increases the removal of toxins in your body. Some people may feel this toxin release as feeling a little tired, a little stomach upset or other mild symptoms, but they all disappear quite quickly. And don't we all want to get rid of toxins?

Some people think that chiropractors are just back specialists, but that is far from the truth. The truth is that chiropractors can adjust any joint in the body! Wrists, ankles, shoulders, yes, fingers and toes and even your jaw! And think of what you would feel like if all your joints are moving freely and properly. Moreover, chiropractic has always had success in the treatment of disc problems. Flexion-distraction therapy and spinal decompression therapy both involve the use of specialized chiropractic tables which gently distract the spine allowing the disc to move back into its normal position. Sometimes, however, surgery is necessary to resolve a disc problem as when the jelly-like substance in the middle of the disc, called the nucleus pulposus, is damaged and leaks out into the surrounding area of the fibrous disc.

In many states chiropractors are primary care physicians which means they can order lab tests, imaging such as X-rays, MRIs, and CTs and can serve as your first contact into the health care system. Some also specialize in neurology, nutrition, acupuncture, and radiology all of which require at least two more years of education beyond the four of chiropractic college. Others specialize in pediatrics, female medicine, and pain management.

In my many years of practice as a chiropractor and naturopath, there have been quite a few questions and concerns about what chiropractors do as they treat patients. It is my intention to answer those questions and concerns and clear up any misconceptions. So here are a few FAQs:

Why do I need to keep on coming back to see my chiropractor?

If you have a new injury such as a sprain (injury to a ligament or tendon) or strain (injury to a muscle), the affected tissue wants to stay in the position it is now in. The same process also occurs with a simple misalignment of two vertebrae, they want to stay in their 'new' position. So all of those structures need to be guided to move into their previously healthy state since no joint will adjust itself. Likewise, torn soft tissue, such as in a sprain or strain, will heal in a crosshatch pattern (somewhat like a page fence) instead of its normal longitudinal lines. In all of these conditions, normal movement will be limited. So both adjusting a joint and treating the soft tissue will return those structures to a healthy function, but these treatments need to occur several times to "teach" that injured or out of alignment structure to stay in its new and normal position. Consider this, would you take a prescription med or botanical for your high blood pressure only once and expect it to cure the hypertension or your high cholesterol? Just as multiple doses are needed of these, multiple visits to get adjusted are needed too.

Will getting adjusted hurt?

Since each body is so different, people will have various responses to getting adjusted. Depending on the person's nutritional health, stresses from life, how long the problem has been there, and their physical fitness, there is occasionally some soreness after treatment, but it is a soreness much like that experienced after a workout at the gym. This usually disappears later that day or sometime during the next. Frequently, chiropractors will relax the soft tissue in the area to be adjusted by doing therapeutic ultrasound, massage, or electric modalities which make the adjustment easier to apply. I have had patients say that they can't believe chiropractic can be so gentle and yet so effective.

What education prepares chiropractors to practice as physicians?

After earning a BA or BS in their undergrad education, 'chiropractors to be' will then go through 4 years of a chiropractic college where in the first two years they take an intensive course load of biological sciences such as anatomy, physiology, pathology, neuroanatomy, neurophysiology, microbiology to name a few. They also start classes in adjusting in their first year which intensify in number and complexity each year after that. At least eight terms in imaging (Xray, MRIs) are included as well as classes in lab diagnosis and interpretation.

So with this discussion on what chiropractic entails, it is worth considering using chiropractic not only for musculoskeletal injuries, but also as a part of your dedication to optimizing your health and keeping your body in its prime!

¹ Pettman, E. PT, MCSP, MCPA, FCAMT, COMT, "A History of Manipulative Therapy", The Journal of Manipulative Therapy, 2007; 15(3): 165-174, NCBI, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2565620/>

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Dr. Bonnie Wickwire is a board-certified naturopath and board-certified chiropractor with over 25 years of experience in the alternative medicine field. She has served as both physician and educator at the National University of Natural Medicine and the University of Western States both in Portland, Oregon, and also sustained a successful private practice while doing so. Her clinical specialty is gastrointestinal conditions as well as conditions in the musculoskeletal system of the body and how they affect the whole person. She is passionate about teaching the world the efficacy and strength of natural medicine and is confident she will continue to do so for a long time to come!

