

A Guide to Chiropractic

What is chiropractic?

Chiropractic is a natural, conservative, medication-free and non-surgical form of health care. The writings of Hippocrates (460-370 BC), Galen (130-200 AD), and even ancient manuscripts of the Egyptians, Hindus, and Chinese reveal some principles common to chiropractic.

In the United States, D.D. Palmer, the father of modern chiropractic, implemented the use of spinal manipulation as a primary treatment method in the late 1800s.

Chiropractic manipulative therapy (CMT) is a procedure used by chiropractors to reduce spinal subluxation or areas of inflexibility that may have been the result of an injury. Subluxation may lead to inflammation, pain, stiffness, swelling, weakness and dysfunction of related tissues such as muscles, ligaments and nerves. CMT corrects the subluxation, or joint dysfunction, in an effort to allow the body to heal these damaged tissues.

What Conditions Do Chiropractors Treat?

Chiropractors specialize in treating various conditions of the nerve, muscle and skeletal systems of the body. Some of these conditions include joint disorders, neck, low back and extremity pain; sprains and strains; headaches; chronic arthritic conditions; and certain neurologic disorders, such as sciatica, manifesting in symptoms such as numbness and tingling. Your chiropractor will be able to advise you about available treatment choices for your specific condition. You and your chiropractor may wish to discuss your condition and treatment options with your primary care physician.

What Kind of Training and License Does a Chiropractor Have?

Chiropractors are licensed in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and 75 countries around the world. A chiropractor's education consists of at least two years of undergraduate college education and a minimum of 4,400 hours of approved chiropractic college training. This training includes coursework in anatomy, physiology, pathology, microbiology, public health, physical diagnosis, X-ray, chiropractic manipulative therapy and physiotherapy modalities, rehabilitation, and nutrition. To become licensed, the chiropractor must successfully pass written and clinical examinations. In addition, most states require continuing education for relicensure.¹

What Should I know About the Proposed Treatments?

After taking your health history and performing an appropriate physical examination, which may include X-rays and clinical lab studies, your chiropractor will explain the nature of your condition and recommend an appropriate treatment plan. In addition to manipulation, your chiropractor may use physiotherapy modalities such as ice, heat,

ultrasound or electric muscle stimulation, and include lifestyle, exercise and nutrition counseling for preventive health, if necessary. The benefits and risks of your treatment plan will be explained to you as well as other treatment options, as applicable. You will be referred to your primary care physician or other health care specialist, if your condition requires diagnosis or treatment outside the scope of your chiropractor's training and practice.

How Many Treatments Will I Need?

Depending on the duration, severity and nature of your complaint as well as your physical activity, the number and frequency of treatments may vary. You may need only one treatment or a series of treatments over several weeks. A typical office visit will last about 10 to 25 minutes. Some conditions may require coordinated care with other specialists and/or your primary care physician.

Does Chiropractic Manipulation Hurt?

Chiropractic manipulation (also called an "adjustment") usually is not painful or uncomfortable. You may feel a quick stretching sensation at the area of the adjustment accompanied by pressure applied by the chiropractor. This feeling quickly subsides, and patients often report an immediate feeling of relief after the adjustment is made. Occasionally a dull, "sore" feeling may persist for a short time after the adjustment. You may experience some discomfort if manipulation is given for treatment of an acute injury. Often when an adjustment is made, there is the sound of "popping" or "cracking." The noise is due to a change of pressure within the joint between the bones.

How Should I Prepare For A Chiropractic Treatment?

Wear loose-fitting clothes and avoid wearing jewelry, one-piece dresses or tight stockings as they may hinder the examination or treatment. Many chiropractors ask their patients to change into a gown that opens in the back, which allows access to the entire spinal area. For your first visit, you will want to ask your chiropractor to explain what you should expect with each aspect of the examination and treatment before it is performed.

What Can I Expect After Treatment?

Patients sometimes experience significant improvement after their first treatment. In a few cases, there may be no immediate relief. In most cases, patients notice their condition gradually improving over a course of treatment. If you have any questions with any part of your treatment, please talk to your chiropractor. As with any form of therapy, if you experience an unusual or unexpected reaction or worsening of symptoms, contact your chiropractor immediately.

What About Other Treatments I May Be Receiving?

Be sure to tell your chiropractor about any other treatments you may be receiving. This would include physical therapy, massage therapy, acupuncture, over-the-counter and prescribed medications, herbs and vitamins. This information is important so that the chiropractor may properly manage your treatment. Job Analysis of Chiropractic, National Board of Chiropractic Examiners, January 2000. The information provided in this article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or healthcare. Always seek the advice of your physician before beginning any new treatment or fitness program or if you have questions regarding a medical condition.

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