



Halifax Chiropractic Clinic

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Chiropractic – Safe and Effective? Absolutely by Dr. Brian S. Seaman, DC, FCCSS(C), FICC

Chiropractors, as with any doctor, will always consider whether chiropractic care is appropriate for each patient. This would include discussing your problem (taking a history) and performing an examination of the area of concern. Depending upon your history and examination findings, your chiropractor may arrange for x-rays or other diagnostic tests. He/she may also want to review past medical information and request these reports from your family physician or medical specialist. It is only after considering all this information, that the decision is made as to whether chiropractic treatment is clinically indicated for your particular problem.

Your chiropractor will also consider the benefits as well as any potential risks with this type of treatment. This would be no different than your family physician selecting what type of medication would be best suited to your situation. In doing so he/she would consider the appropriateness of the treatment approach and any potential side effects or risks.

Chiropractic care is widely recognized as one of the safest and most effective forms of treatment available for conditions such as neck pain, back pain, headaches and whiplash. It is estimated that over 150,000 Canadians are treated by chiropractors every day. Patients who have seen a chiropractor, frequently express their satisfaction with this health care approach, and the results of their treatment. If your condition is not responding as anticipated, your chiropractor may recommend some type of concurrent treatment (ie. massage therapy), an alternative approach, further evaluation, advanced diagnostic imaging (ie. CT scan or MRI), or referral to a chiropractic or medical specialist. There are chiropractic specialists in the fields of clinical sciences, rehabilitation, orthopedics, xray and of course sports injuries.

One question which is often asked by patients is what to expect after their first treatment. Generally, but not in all cases, you may experience some mild soreness or stiffness in the area being treated. Many patients have commented that it feels as if they have done a workout (after a period of time out of the gym) or tried a new exercise. This discomfort usually only occurs after the first few treatments and can result from the small spinal muscles adapting to the improvement in how the joints are moving.

By way of an analogy, if you have ever broken a bone and had to wear a cast for a few weeks, think back to how stiff the area was after the cast was removed. The muscles generally become sore as you attempt to get back to normal activity and as the muscles learn to function properly again.

If you are having neck difficulties, headaches or suffered a whiplash type injury, your chiropractor will consider a variety of additional factors to determine if treatment is appropriate for you. This would include assessing for any potential risk factors or stroke, if manipulation or spinal adjustments of the neck area (cervical spine) are being considered.

Many patients are not aware there are many risk factors for stroke including blood clotting problems, smoking, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels, use of birth control pills and heart disease. All of these carry a higher risk of stroke or stroke-like symptoms with spinal manipulation or adjustments. If a patient presents with a history of TIA (often referred to as a "mini-stroke"), stroke (CVA or cerebro-vascular accident) or is on prescribed anti-coagulants (or "blood thinners" such as Heparin or Coumadin) I do not recommend utilizing spinal manipulation or adjustments in the cervical spine (neck area).

As you can see, it is very important that you ensure that your chiropractor is aware of any health conditions or problems you may be experiencing. Patients often question why they have to complete a "health questionnaire" when they are coming into the clinic for lower back or neck pain. By reviewing any health issues as part of your "history", your chiropractor may notice some problems which could indicate further evaluation is necessary or that there may be other health concerns for which you may be referred back to your family physician.

As a chiropractor, I am often asked "How safe are neck adjustments?". The risk of stroke or



stroke-like symptoms associated with spinal adjustments in the neck, is very rare. However all the published studies to date agree that the risk is extremely low. In fact the recently published Neck Pain Task Force (refer to one of my recent articles) confirms that the chance of you having a stroke after seeing your chiropractor is no greater than after you see your family physician. In other words there is sufficient evidence in the scientific journals to suggest that manipulation techniques, when performed by a chiropractor, may not be the cause of strokes. Overall, a ratio of 1 case per million neck adjustments, is generally recognized as a reasonable estimate, but even that would now be considered a conservative estimate.

Obviously, there are risks to any type of treatment. This is true for chiropractic as well but as you can see, the treatment is very safe and has been shown to be effective for conditions such as neck pain, back pain, headaches and whiplash.

If you have any questions about chiropractic and whether it would be appropriate for your condition please speak to your local chiropractor.

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