

“HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE, DOC?”

This is probably one of the most common questions you ask your health care professional. In most cases, a reasonably good estimate can be given – whether it be days, weeks or months. In some cases, it will be a relief to hear the answer, and at other times you may get a bit discouraged, especially if the answer is not what you expected.

The answer you get depends on a number of things such as:

- What is the nature of your condition?
- How did your problem happen?
- The length of time you have had the problem.
- How severe it is.

As with any health care professional, a chiropractor is used to answering this question about conditions such as:

- Cervicogenic headaches (headaches originating from the neck area).
- Neck pain or whiplash type injuries.
- Back pain.
- Arm or leg pain

Patients who are involved in motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) often present with a number of complaints or symptoms which may include tingling, numbness or pain in their arms or legs. These types of problems can be referred pain from the injured areas, due to inflammation of the joints, or perhaps even a disc injury (ie. a herniation which is sometimes referred to as a 'slipped disc').

After reviewing your history in detail, and doing a thorough examination, your chiropractor will estimate the time for your body to respond, based on a number of things including his or her clinical experience. Obviously, after treating hundreds of cases of back pain over the years, your chiropractor can usually provide a fairly accurate estimate of the time to treat your condition. This could involve an initial response to treatment (sometimes referred to as a therapeutic trial) or what it will likely take to reach a maximum level of chiropractic improvement (referred to as MCI).

Just as your family physician may decide on a different medication approach to a particular health problem, your chiropractor may decide on a different approach if your condition is not responding to the original therapeutic trial. Although the 'ideal' goal would be to eliminate your pain, you may have a problem that has been around for a number of years – what we call a 'chronic condition'. The goal with chronic problems, may be to:

- Reduce or better manage your pain levels.
- Increase your level of functioning through the day (or your ability to do things).
- Improve the quality of your life (like playing with your dog, children or grandchildren).

In many cases, you will have significant improvement with your problem and it may even resolve. But the nature of your condition may require periodic check-ups or treatment to sustain the level of improvement which you have achieved and enjoyed. This is considered **supportive care**, which is treatment for patients who have reached a maximum therapeutic benefit, but fail to sustain this benefit and have a reoccurrence of symptoms when treatment is periodically withdrawn or regular treatment is discontinued.

Your chiropractor will design some type of exercise program or recommend a fitness activity to help increase the strength and/or flexibility of your body, and perhaps even suggest a cardiovascular activity as well. If you have lower back problems, it will be important to increase your 'core muscle strength' which includes your abdominals. If you are a few pounds overweight, reducing this will also help your lower back. It has been calculated that, for every extra pound of abdominal weight, this places an additional 15 lbs strain on the lower back (lumbar spine).

So – back to the original question, how it will take? The answer is --- **it depends**. It's a good question though, and one which your health care professional should be able to provide some insight for you. If you are unsure, please do not hesitate to ask. Understanding the nature of your problem as well as what should be expected from treatment, is important.

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