

SENIORS ADVOCATE ARTICLE
June 2010 Issue

CHIROPRACTIC Q&A

Those of you who have read my articles on a regular basis, I have seen a variety of topics related to your overall health as well as lifestyle issues. As a health care professional, I address questions from patients on a daily basis. In this article, I answer a number of frequently asked questions about chiropractic.

WHAT IS CHIROPRACTIC?

Chiropractic is a 'hands on' or manual treatment, used to improve the mobility of the joints in your body that have decreased or restricted movement. An area of altered biomechanics (how your bones, muscles and joints work together) may cause a reaction in the surrounding tissues which you feel as pain, or a muscle spasm. Chiropractors use adjustments or specific manipulative techniques to correct spinal or extremity joint problems. Chiropractors also provide rehabilitative exercises and can advise you on other approaches such as lifestyle or dietary counselling. Chiropractic is drug-free and non-invasive (no surgery).

WHAT IS A CHIROPRACTIC ADJUSTMENT?

Depending on the diagnosis, the chiropractor will determine if treatment will involve chiropractic adjustments or other appropriate therapies. The goal of an adjustment is to restore normal function and motion to the joints, often relieving pain. The adjustment is a controlled and directed pressure applied with the chiropractor's hands.

WHY SHOULD I SEE A CHIROPRACTOR?

Chiropractors treat many health conditions which affect today's population including, but not limited to:

- Headaches
- Neck and back pain
- Muscular tension
- Work related injuries

- Sprains/ strains
- Tendonitis/ tendonosis
- Sports related injuries
- Postural strain
- Motor vehicle accident (MVA) injuries

Periodic check ups may be recommended to monitor a patient's progress and determine if continued chiropractic care, or additional approaches to treatment are clinically indicated.

IS CHIROPRACTIC CARE SAFE?

Yes, chiropractic care is very safe. It is a drugless, non-invasive approach which can assist your body's ability to utilize its inherent healing abilities. Millions of people safely receive chiropractic adjustments each day!

DO YOU NEED A REFERRAL TO SEE A CHIROPRACTOR?

It is not necessary for a medical doctor to refer you to the clinic for treatment, though many of our patients are referred by their medical doctors or specialists. If you have private coverage, individual plans may vary according to this necessity. WCB claims do not require a referral whereas Section B insurers (for motor vehicle accidents) often request this.

WHAT IS THAT CRACKING OR POPPING SOUND SOMETIMES HEARD DURING THE ADJUSTMENT?

This is called 'cavitation' and is actually the release of gases from the fluid found within the joint. It is not a cracking of the bones, but is similar to the sound heard when one 'cracks' their knuckles.

DO I HAVE A 'SLIPPED DISC'?

Contrary to popular belief, discs cannot actually slip out of their anatomical position. Discs are located between the vertebrae and act as shock absorbers through the spine. Trauma or injury to a disc may occur which can cause the inner gel-like portion of the disc to protrude, bulge or herniate through the tougher, outer fibrous layer. This can be quite painful and can cause either

localized or generalized back pain, or depending upon the level, may cause pain into the arms or legs. This may occur if the disc puts pressure on the spinal cord and/or nerve roots.

DO I HAVE A 'PINCHED NERVE'?

Injuries, falls, accidents, muscular strains and ligament sprains can change or alter how the joints of your body function, especially your spine. This in turn can affect the sensitive nerve tissues, the spinal cord or nerve roots. Compressive injuries, suggestive of a 'pinched' nerve are not common. More often, the nerve roots are irritated or inflamed due to spinal joint dysfunction. Compression of the nerve root may cause symptoms including pain, numbness, tingling and/or a burning sensation.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT AT THE FIRST VISIT?

Your first visit will involve a consultation (history and presenting complaints) and examination, which can vary depending on your injury. A detailed history and examination are performed in order for the chiropractor to establish a clinical impression or diagnosis of your condition. It may be necessary for the chiropractor to order certain tests (i.e. x-rays) before advising chiropractic care or referring you to another health care professional. If chiropractic care is indicated, your chiropractor will explain a treatment schedule (frequency and duration of your care) which will be dependent on your condition and examination findings.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO GET BETTER?

Many patients will begin to notice an improvement in their condition within the first few visits. Depending on the individual case, response time will obviously vary with respect to factors which could include age, physical fitness, the length of time one has been experiencing the problem, and the severity of the condition. Do not hesitate to ask your chiropractor what you should expect as far as responding to treatment. Remember – everyone is different.

WILL EXERCISES HELP MY CONDITION?

Once your chiropractor has assessed your condition, he or she may recommend exercises to help increase your flexibility (length of your muscles) and increase your strength, with exercises specific to your particular case.

CAN CHIROPRACTIC HELP ‘WHIPLASH’?

Chiropractic care has been shown to help restore normal joint motion in the neck and upper back and reduce muscular guarding and headaches often associated with the trauma of whiplash injuries. The joints of the neck are the most commonly injured structures of whiplash.

WHAT EDUCATION IS REQUIRED TO BECOME A CHIROPRACTOR?

The education of a chiropractor requires a minimum prerequisite of three years of university followed by a four-year academic program. The curricula include courses such as anatomy, pathology, neuroscience, general diagnosis, orthopaedics, neurology, biomechanics/kinesiology, radiology (X ray) and manipulation techniques. As a result of this education, chiropractors are among the most qualified of all health care professionals in the care of neuromusculoskeletal conditions and are leaders in the field of manipulative therapy.

DOES INSURANCE COVER MY CHIROPRACTIC CARE?

Nova Scotia’s provincial plan (MSI) does not cover your chiropractic care. However, most private insurance plans do contribute to the cost of care. If you have suffered the injury as a result of work, your treatments may be covered by the Worker’s Compensation Board (WCB) of Nova Scotia. If you have been involved in a motor vehicle accident (MVA), Section B insurance often covers the fees associated with your care.

Dr. Seaman is a native Maritimer who is in private practice at the Halifax Chiropractic Clinic and was a member of the Canadian Health Care Team at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. Learn more about chiropractic by visiting the clinic website www.halifaxchiropractic.ca