Chiropractic

Introduction

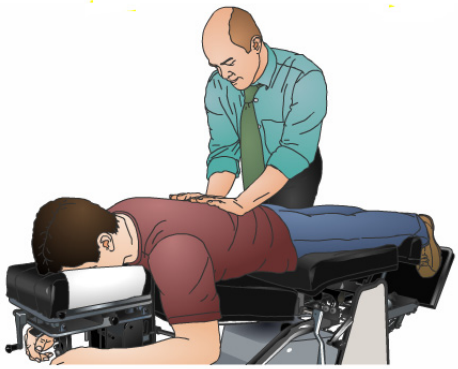
Chiropractic is health care that focuses on disorders of the musculoskeletal system and the nervous system, and the way these disorders affect general health. Chiropractic uses a type of hands-on therapy called spinal manipulation or adjustment. Many people go to chiropractors for treatment of low back pain.

Doctors of chiropractic, or DCs, believe the body can heal itself if the bones and muscles of the body are properly aligned. This means healing can take place without surgery or medication. This is why DCs adjust muscles and bones to take pressure off of nerves in the body.

This reference summary will help you understand chiropractic. It discusses the benefits, risks and what to expect from chiropractic treatment.

What is Chiropractic?

The term “chiropractic” is made up of the Greek words cheir and praxis. Cheir means “hand” and praxis means “practice.” Chiropractic is a term used to describe a treatment done by hand. Hands-on therapy is central to chiropractic care.



Doctors of chiropractic, or DCs, believe the body can heal itself without surgery or medication. But to heal, the bones and muscles of the body must be aligned. To properly align bones and muscles of the body, DCs use a type of hands-on therapy called spinal manipulation, or adjustment.

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Using their hands, DCs manipulate and adjust parts of the body. This is done to restore mobility to joints restricted by tissue injury.

Tissue injury may be caused by:

- A traumatic event, such as falling.
- Repetitive stress, such as sitting without proper back support.

Spinal adjustment is not unique to chiropractic care. Other health care providers, such as physical therapists, may use spinal manipulation.

Chiropractors often use other treatments in addition to spinal manipulation or adjustment, such as:

- Nutritional counseling.
- Exercise.
- Physical rehabilitation.

Benefits

Chiropractic care is thought to be a safe and effective treatment for many cases of acute low back pain. This is back pain caused by a sudden injury. Such an injury may happen when moving heavy objects or getting tackled as part of a sport.

Acute back pain is pain that shows up suddenly and lasts no more than six weeks. It often gets better on its own.

Chiropractic may also be helpful in treating neck pain and headaches. People with osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia may find relief from their symptoms through moderate pressure. This technique is used both by chiropractors and deep tissue massage therapists. Osteoarthritis is a common joint disorder caused by aging and wear and tear on joints.

Fibromyalgia is a health problem in which a person has ongoing pain all over his or her body. He or she feels tenderness in the joints, muscles, tendons and other soft tissues.

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Therapies in which pressure is applied to the body using hands were recently studied. The study found that spinal manipulation may be helpful for several conditions. In addition to back pain, this type of therapy may help with:

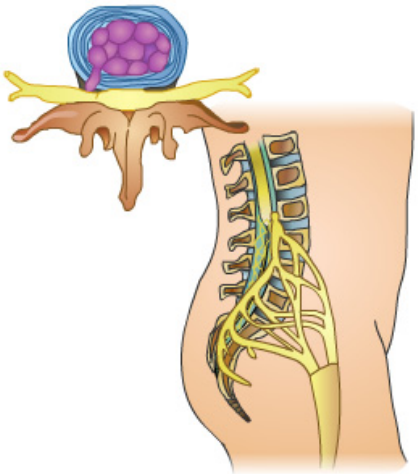
- Migraine and headaches caused by neck injury.
- Neck pain.
- Upper and lower extremity joint conditions.
- Whiplash associated disorders.

Risks

Chiropractic adjustment should only be performed by a trained and licensed doctor of chiropractic.

Serious problems related to chiropractic adjustment are very rare. They include:

- A herniated disk.
- Compression of nerves in the lower spinal column. This can cause pain, weakness, loss of feeling in your legs and loss of bowel or bladder control.
- A certain type of stroke, called vertebral artery dissection, after neck manipulation.



People who have certain medical conditions should not undergo spinal manipulation. These conditions include:

- Osteoporosis.
- Spinal cord compression.
- Inflammatory arthritis.
- A condition that requires the use of blood thinning medication.

If you have a history of cancer, talk to your health care provider before you have a spinal manipulation. Your health care provider can help you decide whether the treatment is safe for you.

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Before Chiropractic

During your first visit, the chiropractor typically takes a health history. He or she will perform a physical examination with a special emphasis on the spine.

Other examinations or tests such as x-rays may also be performed. If chiropractic treatment is right for you, you will work with the chiropractor to develop a treatment plan.

During Chiropractic

The goal of treatment is to increase the range and quality of motion in the area being treated. Joint mobilization is another type of manual therapy that may be used.

During the adjustment, the chiropractor may place you in specific positions. This allows the chiropractor to treat affected areas. You may lie face down on a special padded table.

The chiropractor will use his or her hands to apply a controlled amount of pressure to a joint. This is done to push the joint beyond its normal range of motion. During the adjustment, it is common to hear popping or cracking sounds.

Chiropractors may combine the use of spinal adjustments with other treatments. These include:

- Heat and ice.
- Electrical stimulation.
- Relaxation techniques.
- Rehabilitative and general exercise.
- Counseling about diet, weight loss and other lifestyle factors.
- Dietary supplements.

Although the length of time varies depending on your needs, spinal manipulation or adjustment often takes less than an hour.

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After Chiropractic

A follow up visit is often scheduled after the first adjustment. Chiropractic treatment often requires several sessions.

Some people do not respond to chiropractic adjustments. If your symptoms do not improve after a few weeks of treatment, it might not be an effective treatment for you. If this happens, talk to your regular health care provider about other treatment options. It is important to tell your regular health care provider about any treatment you receive.

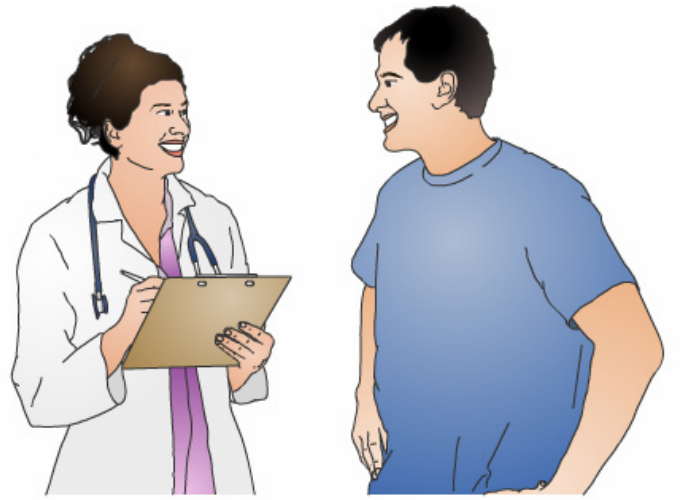
Summary

Doctors of chiropractic believe the body can heal itself. For this to happen, the bones and muscles of the body must be properly aligned. They use spinal manipulation or adjustment to adjust muscles and bones. This takes pressure off of nerves in the body.

Chiropractors use their hands to apply a controlled amount of pressure to a joint. This is done to push the joint beyond its normal range of motion. The goal of treatment is to increase the range and quality of motion in the area being treated. This should aid in restoring health.

Chiropractic care may be helpful for back pain caused by a sudden injury. It may also be helpful in treating neck pain and headaches.

Chiropractic adjustment should only be performed by a trained and licensed doctor of chiropractic. Serious problems related to chiropractic adjustment are rare but serious. They include a herniated disk, compression of nerves in the lower spinal column, and vertebral artery dissection.



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