

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Back Pain in Seniors: The Chiropractic Solution

Back pain is a common condition among older adults. And more and more seniors are turning to chiropractic to alleviate and prevent this debilitating disorder.

Chiropractors, like Dr. Smith, get results because they understand the unique workings of the aging spine and know how to keep it in top form. Chiropractic care is focused on prevention — and on addressing the underlying causes of pain and disability, rather than masking symptoms with drugs. To this end, Dr. Smith works with seniors to detect the root cause of their back pain and stop it at its source.

Frequently, the root cause is **vertebral subluxations**. Vertebral subluxations are areas in the spine where motion is restricted or bones (vertebrae) are out of alignment. Dr. Smith corrects vertebral subluxations using gentle maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

Back Pain in Seniors: A Serious and Widespread Problem

Back pain in seniors is more than a mild annoyance; it can have serious consequences. Back pain and its asso-

ciated conditions, such as impaired flexibility, can affect an older individual's overall health and ability to live independently.

In fact, a study in the journal *Spine* states that chronic back pain "is a growing source of morbidity among the elderly." (*Spine* 2006;31:E203-7.) Another report looked at 1,484 community-dwelling Australian women 70 to 85 years of age. The researchers found that subjects with daily back pain reported more problems with

mobility and rated their quality of life lower than those with infrequent back pain.

Daily back pain was also associated with greater overall mortality risk and greater risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) mortality and new CHD diagnosis. The researchers concluded that "daily back pain is associated with reduced quality of life, mobility and longevity and increased risk of coronary heart events. The adverse health effects of chronic back pain deserve greater recognition." (*Spine* 2007;32:2012-8.)

In addition, compared with younger individuals, seniors need to be extra cautious about taking pain medications. An older person's body is not as well equipped to handle medication. For example, changes in the kidneys and liver related to the aging process make it more difficult for the body to break down and eliminate drugs. To remain healthy and independent without the use of possibly dangerous medication, many seniors are turning to chiropractic for back pain — and getting excellent results.

Chiropractic Care For the Aging Spine

The spine changes during the aging process. It becomes less adept at withstanding the daily stresses and strains.

Dr. Smith understands the aging spine and the ideal ways to care for it — and to slow degeneration.



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And seniors are clearly getting the message that chiropractic is uniquely suited to their health needs. When researchers surveyed 2,055 individuals age 65 or older, they found that 20 percent had visited an alternative care practitioner during the previous year.

Most of these visits were to doctors of chiropractic (*J Amer Ger Soc* 2000;48:1560-5).

In another analysis, 61.9 percent of seniors using complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) sought chiropractic care. Results revealed that the “most prevalent motivations for using CAM were pain relief (54.8%), improved quality of life (45.2%) and maintenance of health and fitness (40.5%).” (*J Gerontological Nursing* 2003;29:20-8.)

Lifestyle, Exercise and The Aging Spine

Doctors of chiropractic also help seniors incorporate lifestyle changes that can mitigate or prevent back pain.

One extensive study analyzed the effect of this lifestyle aspect of chiropractic care on seniors. The report sought to determine whether there were differences between patients who had long-term exposure to these preventive services vs. those who had not. The researchers looked at chiropractic patients (age 65 years and over) who had received health-promotion and prevention services for at least five years, with a minimum of four visits per year (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:10-9).

The study’s authors found that chiropractors commonly recommended stretching exercises (68.2 percent) and aerobic exercises (55.6 percent); gave dietary advice (45.3 percent); and advised on a host of other prevention strategies, including vitamins and

relaxation. The patients investigated in this study reported making only half the annual number of visits to medical providers (4.76 visits per year) compared with the national average (nine visits per year) for individuals age 65 years and over.

The researchers concluded that this type of care “does not simply consist solely of periodic visits for joint manipulation, but it involves an eclectic host of interventions (eg, exercise, nutrition, relaxation, physical therapy, and manipulation) that are directed at both musculoskeletal and visceral conditions.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:10-9.)

Exercise is one important lifestyle factor related to back pain in seniors. The doctor helps seniors with back pain incorporate appropriate exercise into their daily routine to help keep back pain at bay.

One study looked at the relationship between physical activity and low-back pain (LBP) among 1,387 seniors. The participants were between 70 and 100 at the study’s start. Among the

participants, 83 percent were engaged in light physical activity, and 42 percent of men and 35 percent of women were engaged in strenuous physical activity at least weekly.

Findings revealed that strenuous physical activity was strongly protective against low-back pain. The researchers conclude, “Strenuous physical activity at least once a week is protective for incident LBP in seniors.” (*Spine* 2007;32:76-81.)

Optimal Well-being for Seniors

Senior years should be a time to actively enjoy life. Chiropractic care helps seniors do just that. Take charge of your well-being by scheduling an appointment with our office today!

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