

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

## Vertebral Subluxations Defined

*Dr. Smith is often asked by patients to explain what is meant by the term “vertebral subluxation.”*

*A vertebral subluxation is an area in the spine where movement is restricted or bones (vertebrae) are out of alignment. This may mean that a vertebral bone is slightly “out of place” or that a section of several vertebrae are misaligned. In addition, a vertebral subluxation refers to a region in the spine that lacks normal movement or simply isn’t functioning properly (this is why vertebral subluxations are sometimes referred to as vertebral dysfunctions or spinal dysfunctions). In a nutshell, it is an area of the spine that is under stress.*

As a holistic health-care practitioner, Dr. Smith addresses a wide array of factors that influence patients’ well being, including nutrition, exercise and stress. However, spinal health is the foundation of chiropractic’s revolutionary approach to achieving optimal wellness.

Specifically, Dr. Smith seeks to identify, correct and prevent these dysfunctional areas of the spine known as vertebral subluxations. Although this condition is widespread, many individuals know little — or nothing — about the toll it may be exacting on their health. Read on to learn about vertebral subluxations and how to keep yourself and your family free of this common health challenge.

### The Spine Connection

In order to fully comprehend what a vertebral subluxation is, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of spinal anatomy.

The spine is comprised of individual bones known as vertebrae: seven in the neck (cervical vertebrae), twelve in the upper back (thoracic vertebrae) and five in the lower back (lumbar vertebrae). At the foundation of the spine lay the hip bones (one sacrum and two iliac bones). The coccyx (“tail

bone”) forms the tip of the sacrum. Fluid-filled pillows called intervertebral discs separate vertebrae.



### Tips on Detecting Vertebral Subluxations From Dr. Smith

The following postural problems are often indicative of underlying vertebral subluxations:

- ☞ A tendency to slump forward while sitting.
- ☞ A “Dowager’s hump” or “hunched back” in the upper region of the back.
- ☞ One hip appears higher than the other.
- ☞ A “flat” lower back, or lack of the natural curve, which should cave very slightly in toward the stomach.
- ☞ A “swayed” lower back or exaggerated curving toward the stomach.
- ☞ One shoulder rests higher than the other.
- ☞ A tendency to hold the head tipped or slightly rotated to one side.
- ☞ A tendency to hold the head forward so that, if a line were dropped directly down from the ear, it would fall in front of the shoulder.

How can you monitor your posture to identify possible vertebral subluxations? First, maintain regular chiropractic checkups. Second, ask Dr. Smith to teach you simple “posture checks” you can use to keep track of your alignment between checkups.

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These bundles of connective tissue facilitate motion, cushion surrounding vertebrae and prevent vertebrae from rubbing against each other.

The vertebrae, all of which contain hollow spaces in the center, are stacked one on top of the other. The hollow spaces align, forming a protective bony column. This column houses the confluence of nervous tissue called the spinal cord. Nerves that supply (or *innervate*) almost every structure in the body — from the heart to the muscle that moves the little toe — emerge from the spinal cord.

### Musculoskeletal Conditions

Most frequently, vertebral subluxations are associated with maladies involving muscles and bones (*musculoskeletal* disorders). Musculoskeletal disorders include back pain, neck pain, sports injuries, jaw problems (temporal mandibular dysfunction), whiplash injury, sciatica, headaches and joint pain.

It's no wonder that vertebral subluxations trigger musculoskeletal pain. After all, vertebrae are attached to muscles and other bones via tendons and ligaments. One glance at an anatomical diagram of the back and neck shows that, in one way or another, all the muscles and bones in this region are connected.

A misaligned vertebra disrupts the intricate dance between muscles and bones. This disruption creates a state of imbalance — in turn exerting stress on connecting structures and producing discomfort.

### Other Conditions

Although eliminating vertebral subluxations is an extremely effective strategy for ending back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders, doctors of chiropractic are much more than “back doctors.” Scientific studies show that vertebral subluxations may also play a role in a vast spectrum of ailments (see side box).

What's the connection between the spine and disease? Although more

research is needed before a firm link is established, the prevailing theory is as follows: Because nerves traveling back and forth to the spinal cord emerge between vertebrae, vertebral subluxations may affect the messages sent by these nerves to the structures they innervate, including the organs.

### Detecting Vertebral Subluxations: The Chiropractic Approach

How do doctors of chiropractic identify vertebral subluxations? They begin with a health history and wellness assessment. A history of physical trauma, deskwork, repetitive movement, involvement in sports, inactivity or high stress levels tend to increase the risk of vertebral subluxation. Patients also receive a physical examination, including specific orthopedic and neurologic tests.

In addition, doctors of chiropractic consider patients' posture and alignment. A skewed posture suggests that a vertebra — or section of vertebrae — is misaligned. Chiropractors also examine patients' backs in search of movement restrictions or misalignments that may indicate the presence of spinal dysfunction.

A patient's symptoms — such as pain, soreness and stiffness — may also suggest that he or she has a vertebral subluxation. (Note: pain may not appear until after a subluxation has existed for a period of time.)

### Don't Wait Until Subluxations Cause Problems to Seek Help

To correct vertebral subluxations, doctors of chiropractic apply a gentle force to the spine called a *chiropractic adjustment*. These maneuvers restore movement and alignment to dysfunctional vertebra.

When it comes to promoting optimal health, chiropractors know that prevention is key. Rather than treating symptoms in isolation, chiropractors listen to patients and work to identify the underlying factors instigating their health

### Conditions Associated With Vertebral Subluxation

According to scientific studies, vertebral subluxations may play a role in triggering the following conditions — or be a symptom of their presence:

- High blood pressure
- Ear infection
- Difficulty hearing
- Asthma
- Fibromyalgia
- Vertigo
- Attention difficulties
- Premenstrual syndrome
- Digestive problems
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Colic
- Immune problems
- Bed-wetting
- Parkinson's disease
- Breastfeeding problems
- Depression

problems. This means providing nutritional recommendations, giving ergonomic advice, suggesting stress-reduction strategies and encouraging patients to engage in regular exercise. It also means correcting vertebral subluxations before they have a chance to do harm. This is accomplished through regular chiropractic checkups. Just as regular dental checkups help keep your teeth free of cavities, regular chiropractic checkups can keep your spine subluxation-free.

Don't wait until vertebral subluxations affect your health. Schedule an appointment for a chiropractic evaluation today!

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