

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Research: Seniors Benefit from Chiropractic

A growing number of seniors are reaping the benefits of chiropractic care. And, a growing body of scientific evidence demonstrates that chiropractic is advantageous for older people.

Chiropractors often detect *vertebral subluxations* — areas of dysfunction among the bones of the spine (vertebrae) — in seniors. This common malady is linked with an array of conditions, ranging from low-back pain and arthritis to Parkinson's disease and hearing difficulties. Doctors of chiropractic, like Dr. Smith, correct vertebral subluxations with safe, gentle maneuvers known as *chiropractic adjustments*.

Chiropractic More Effective Than Medical Care for Seniors with Back Pain

Research indicates that many medical doctors are 'deficient' in their knowledge of how to care for patients with low-back pain (*Spine* 2009;34:1716-21).

As part of the analysis, 253 orthopedic surgeons and 145 medical family practitioners completed a questionnaire regarding the management of simple low-back pain (LBP), while attending annual professional meetings. "Answers were scored based on the national guidelines for management of low back pain."

The study concludes that "both orthopedic surgeons' and family physicians' knowledge of treating LBP is deficient. Orthopedic surgeons are less

aware of current treatment than family practitioners. Although the importance of publishing guidelines and keeping them up-to-date and relevant for different disciplines in different countries cannot be overstressed, disseminating the knowledge to clinicians is also very important to ensure good practice." (*Spine* 2009;34:1716-21.)

Seniors with back pain require care by doctors who are aware of the distinctive spinal issues that affect an aging spine. Because of their extensive knowledge of the spine, doctors of chiropractic, like Dr. Smith, are uniquely positioned to provide seniors with exceptional care.

One report, which compared chiropractic care with medical care for older patients with low-back pain, concludes that chiropractic care is more effective (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2009;32:330-43).

The randomized controlled trial included 240 people (105 women and 135 men). The participants were all at least 55 years old with subacute or chronic LBP.

The patients were divided into three groups. Two groups underwent chiropractic care, each with a different type of chiropractic adjusting technique. A third group underwent minimal con-



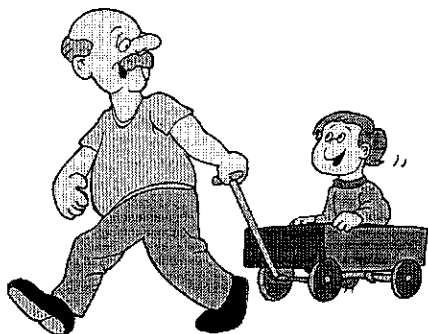
servative medical care, which is the common standard of medical care for seniors with LBP.

The chiropractic intervention included six weeks of care for a total of 12 visits. Seniors who received either type of chiropractic adjustments enjoyed a statistically significant improvement in function over medically-treated patients. What's more, chiropractic care is drug-free, which is particularly beneficial for seniors who may be acutely sensitive to drug interactions and side effects (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2009;32:330-43).

Avoid Unnecessary Medication

During one 12-week study, chiropractors from 32 states and two Canadian provinces collected data on 805 patients over the age of 55. "Pain" was responsible for 72.3 percent of the complaints — with 32.9 percent directly related to back pain.

Results showed a significant drop in the use of pain medication among those who completed the study. An increase in the use of pain medications, however, was noted among the 20 percent who discontinued chiropractic care prior to the close of the experiment (*J Am Geriatr Soc* 2000;48:534-45).



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Growing Numbers of Seniors Seek Chiropractic Care

As baby-boomers reach their senior years, a growing number of older people are discovering chiropractic.

Just how popular is chiropractic care for seniors? 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 one analysis, 61.9 percent of those 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.)

Lisa Killinger of the Palmer Center for Chiropractic Research, Davenport, Iowa, says that “chiropractors may be well-positioned to play an important role in health promotion, injury and disease prevention and on geriatric care teams, due to their practice style and holistic philosophy.” (*Clin Geriatr Med* 2004;20:223-35).

In fact, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research recommends chiropractic adjustments for seniors with acute low-back pain. In addition, Killinger says the American Geriatric Society Panel Guidelines for the Management of Chronic Pain state that “non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as chiropractic, may be appropriate.”

Stay Sharp

Believe it or not, cognitive decline isn't an inevitable aspect of aging. It's obvious that daily social interaction and mental stimulation, such as reading and solving puzzles, keep the brain sharp. But did you know that regular chiropractic care may also preserve mental acumen?

Researchers in Auckland, New Zealand, divided 36 participants into two groups: a chiropractic group who received chiropractic adjustments to the upper cervical spine (spine of the neck), and a control group who underwent a sham procedure. All 36 patients exhibited upper cervical vertebral subluxations at the beginning of the study.

After both procedures, investigators asked participants to identify whether objects appeared normal or as mirror-reversed on a computer screen. The researchers then measured each participant's reaction time. Individuals in the chiropractic group demonstrated a 14.9 percent “significantly greater” improvement in reaction time, while the control group showed a mere 8 percent improvement.

“The results of this study have demonstrated a significant improvement in a complex reaction-time task after an upper cervical adjustment. These results provide evidence that upper cervical adjustment may affect cortical processing.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:246-51.)

Motor Skills Matter

Chiropractic may also help seniors maintain their motor skills.

In one study, researchers asked seniors in a specialized test group to use a computer mouse to move their cursors onto a target in the center of a computer screen. The researchers used a range of widths and target distances to vary the level of difficulty.

“All participants in the experimental group [those receiving chiropractic care] had significantly improved movement times following spinal adjustments compared with only one participant in the control group [those not receiving chiropractic care].”

The results demonstrated significant motor-skill improvement among those receiving chiropractic care, leading researchers to suggest that “spinal adjustments may influence motor behavior.” (*J Manipul Physiol Ther* 2006;29:257-66.)

Live Longer

Searching for the fountain of youth? Look to your local doctor of chiropractic. Left unchecked, chronic back pain is proven to shorten one's life-span. Over a five-year period, researchers followed approximately 1,500 seniors aged 70 to 85. Daily back pain was linked to reduced longevity, quality of life and mobility and increased risks for a coronary heart event (*Spine* 2007;32:2012-18).

Avert Arthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis, occurring when cartilage in joints wears down over time. OA most commonly affects joints in hands, hips, knees and spine.

Fortunately, research shows that chiropractic care helps reduce OA symptoms. One study included 252 OA patients with low-back pain. Researchers randomly assigned subjects to either a chiropractic group who received chiropractic adjustments plus moist heat or a moist-heat only cohort. Both groups participated in 20 care sessions, over several weeks.

At sessions one, five, 10, 15 and 20, sufferers rated pain, activities of daily living and range of motion (ROM). The chiropractic group reported greater and more rapid pain reduction and ROM improvement than the moist heat group. Those under chiropractic care also enjoyed greater improvements in daily living activities in four of the nine areas measured (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2006;29:107-14).

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