FAQ - Chiropractic

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- What is a subluxation?

A subluxation refers to a spinal or peripheral joint that is not moving in its normal motion pattern or is out of place. Subluxations create an imbalance in the spine, irritating nerves and blood vessels, affecting the way our body and brain communicate with one another and can contribute to pain and dysfunction in muscles and organs. Subluxations can be silent or non-symptomatic until the weaknesses or changes in function that they cause result in an eventual breakdown or injury.
• What causes a subluxation?

Accidents, injuries, improper lifting or body mechanics and inherited spinal weaknesses are common causes of subluxations. Other causes include poor sleeping habits, poor posture, obesity, stress, a sedentary lifestyle, internal organ dysfunction and not enough rest or sleep.

• How is a subluxation corrected?

Chiropractors treat subluxations with a healing technique called spinal adjustment, a procedure that involves applying specific, short, quick thrusts to return vertebrae (the bones that compose the spine and protect the spinal cord) to their proper position and motion. They may also use other tools and techniques.

• Does the adjustment hurt?
Most chiropractic adjustments are painless; in fact, the adjustment may feel good and can be relieving. If you’ve had a recent injury, however, adjustments can irritate inflamed tissue and cause some discomfort. Using ice after any irritation is recommended. Some people also experience odd sensations in their muscles or extremities after adjustments. This is a normal reaction to the relieving of pressure on nerves and is usually no cause for concern. It is thought by some scientists to be an increase in circulation once the irritation is removed from the nerve.

• How old should a person be before receiving chiropractic care?

People of all ages are candidates for chiropractic treatment. Even babies can have subluxations, due to the rigors of birth. In general, it’s best to treat children’s subluxations early, as they interfere with nerves that control developing muscles and organs. A rapidly developing spine and all other bones and joints of the body consist of cartilage growth centers that the bone grows from. Abnormal stresses on these growth plates can cause the bones to develop abnormally. With an early checkup, your chiropractor can detect these problems while they’re easy to correct.

• Should I go to a chiropractor if I feel fine?

Your chiropractor can recognize and detect problem areas in your spine before they develop into problem conditions or symptoms. Chiropractic adjustments help to maintain or support a healthy spine and nervous system. Maintenance or wellness spinal care programs, which may include advice on posture, nutrition and exercise, can effectively prevent pain.

Regular checkups will also ensure that small stresses on the spine don’t interfere with the nervous system’s function or become major misalignments. This type of program of
prevention actually optimizes the function of your body. Most people take much better care of their teeth than they do their spine. If your teeth wear out, they can be replaced with artificial ones that will allow you to function (chew your food), as well as the original teeth and give you a nice smile. If your spine wears out, there is no solution.

Because your spine directly influences the function of your nervous system, spinal decay permanently damages the nerves and spinal cord. Nearly everyone flosses and brushes their teeth even though their teeth don’t hurt. Spinal adjustments are like flossing the spine. Adjustments break up the plaque that develops along the spinal joints when those joints are subluxated. Lifetime care of the spine should be a priority!

• How will the adjustment help me?

Chiropractic adjustments help eliminate interference that prevents your body from healing itself. Misaligned vertebrae interfere with your nervous system, which affects organs and muscles throughout your body. Your chiropractor treats the underlying problem, which can alleviate painful symptoms and more importantly, helps the body function properly and heal itself.

• Does an adjustment have to make a noise to be effective?

No. While it’s true that patients often hear a “pop” during an adjustment, similar to the sound you’d hear cracking your knuckles, it’s not related to the treatment’s effectiveness. Instead, the explanation lies in a lubricant called synovial fluid that’s found in every joint. That fluid contains dissolved gases. Shifting the joint with an adjustment into proper motion and alignment releases the built up pressure that has resulted from the joint being subluxated. This causes a shifting of the fluid and gasses in the joint to make a crackling noise.

• How does chiropractic care help pregnant woman?

Pregnancy places additional weight and stress on women’s bodies. Chiropractic treatment can help relieve pregnancy-related low back, leg, neck and shoulder blade pain. It may also reduce incidence of headache and nausea. Anecdotal evidence shows that regular chiropractic care up to the point of delivery can significantly reduce labor time and the chances of complications with delivery.

• Is it true that chiropractors do not prescribe medication or perform surgery?

Yes. Chiropractors don’t prescribe medication or perform invasive procedures. They believe the body has the ability to heal itself, and therefore focus on providing it with the right elements for self-restoration. This makes chiropractic one of the safest of all treatments.
• Is there a connection between stroke and chiropractic treatment?

Would you think twice about cradling the phone on your shoulder, checking your blind spot while backing into a parking space or getting your hair shampooed at a salon? The risk of stroke from chiropractic care is no greater than it is from any of these everyday activities.

The source of public concern in this regard is a condition known as vertebral artery syndrome (VAS), which occurs when sudden head movements disrupt the blood flow in the vertebral artery, possibly leading to stroke. As the above examples illustrate, the risk of this complication arising from upper cervical (or neck) manipulation by a chiropractor is extremely remote. According to the 1996 RAND report, “The Appropriateness of Manipulation and Mobilization of the Cervical Spine,” only one out of every one million chiropractic patients experiences VAS. Other analysis of studies over the last several decades put the risk at between one in a million and one and five million adjustments. To put it another way, you are five to twenty-five times more likely to get hit by lightning than to suffer VAS at the hands of a chiropractor.

Chiropractic is the safest of all types of medical care. Insurance carriers that provide malpractice coverage keep very close statistics on the risk to people receiving different medical procedures. The insurance companies then “rate” the amount of risk that different medical specialties and procedures have for people receiving that form of care. They then charge the doctors that put people at the highest risk the highest premiums. Chiropractors pay by far the lowest premiums for malpractice insurance of any type of medical provider. In fact, most chiropractors pay less for malpractice coverage than the average person pays for automobile insurance.

Up to 75% of chiropractic patients receive cervical manipulation as part of their individual chiropractic care. It may be performed as part of your care for total spinal health and wellness, or for specific causes such as muscle tension and stiffness, headache or injury. After a detailed history and examination, if there is any indication that you would be at risk, your chiropractor will not include a neck adjustment in your treatment.

• How does the safety of chiropractic compare to other medical procedures?

In comparison to allopathic medicine, which uses drugs and surgery as an integral part of treatment, chiropractic presents far less risk. Consider, for example, that in the United States an estimated 140,000 people die each year from drug-related reactions. And the risk of death due to gastrointestinal complications from taking nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs such as aspirin and ibuprofen is 400 times greater that the complication rate for people who receive cervical manipulation, while the mortality rate for people who undergo cervical spine surgery is 7,000 times higher.
Human error is another factor that tilts the safety balance in chiropractic’s favor. In the United States, it is estimated that up to 98,000 Americans die yearly from medical errors -- a doctor accidentally making the wrong incision, a nurse administering the wrong medication, and so on.

But with all forms of treatment, whether allopathic or alternative, any risks, however slight, should not be ignored. While the methods used by chiropractors have proven to be safe in almost all cases, it is a constant concern for chiropractors to evaluate their patients to determine if treatment will cause an adverse reaction.

• Can chiropractic adjustment damage your joints?

The answer is no. In fact the evidence shows clearly that chiropractic manipulation can actually prevent arthritis. It does this by restoring the proper motion to the joint. Medical textbooks will tell you that it is loss of motion of a joint that causes damage and arthritis to the joint. Restoring proper function to the joint provides the cartilage and disc (in the case of the spine), with improved blood supply. Better blood supply means better nourishment and the ability to dispose of waste products. What’s more, most chiropractic adjustments are painless. Often, the adjustment may feel good and can provide immediate relief from stiffness or tension.

• What makes the “crackling noise” when an adjustment is delivered?

While some people may get nervous about the “pop” that an adjustment can produce, the sound is not coming from the bones themselves. It’s coming from a lubricant called synovial fluid that’s found in every joint. That fluid contains dissolved gases. Shifting the joint with an adjustment into proper motion and alignment releases the built up pressure that has resulted from the joint being subluxated. This causes a shifting of the fluid and gasses in the joint to make a crackling noise.

• Are adjustments painful?

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• Can chiropractic adjustment lead to arthritis?

There is no evidence to suggest that chiropractic care and manipulation of the spine can
lead to arthritis. On the contrary, chiropractors often care for people with arthritis by maintaining joint health. Motion is life when it comes to joint health.

• Is it safe to adjust myself?

Concern has been raised over the safety of people who try to adjust themselves, by cracking their own knuckles, for example. While people might have the right idea by trying to relieve pressure on the joints, only chiropractors can ensure an adjustment is performed safely, and in the right direction without possibly weakening or causing harmful friction to surrounding joint structures. The best advice: Don’t try to do it yourself. Seek the expertise of your chiropractor.

• Do chiropractors refer patients to other specialists?

Like other doctors, chiropractors belong to a large and growing network of health-care professionals and make referrals for patients when necessary. Chiropractors are well educated to recognize risk factors and signs of disease and will not hesitate to make a referral when it’s in a patient’s best interest.