

## A Chiropractor's View of Chiropractic

Chiropractic is to the spinal column as dentistry is to the oral cavity. It is my job to examine each vertebra, the associated nerves and soft tissues for proper motion, function and overall health. The normal spine will have 24 individual vertebrae held together by facet joints, discs, ligaments and muscles. There are seven vertebrae in the neck, 12 in the mid back and five in the low back. Between each of these vertebrae exits a corresponding spinal nerve which carries sensory, motor and autonomic fibers that control every tissue in the body. The spine is designed to move freely, with each vertebra moving about three degrees, except for the first and second vertebrae in the neck.

In our younger years, our spines have a lot of flexibility. As we age, our spines have a tendency to move towards more stability; they stiffen and try to calcify. Maintaining proper motion, or what I call "fluid motion," keeps our spines healthy. Think of the vertebrae of the spine as links in a bicycle chain. Each link of that chain should move just a little in order to make the chain function efficiently as a whole. Imagine if a few of these chain links rust together and stop moving. In some cases, the chain may still function, albeit less optimally; and in some cases, it may not function at all. If only two or three links are rusted together the chain will just clunk and clatter around the sprocket. The more links that stop moving, the more likely the chain is to fail completely. This abnormal motion of the chain also creates unwanted stress points in the chain. If I have two links that are squeaky and I allow them to rust together, I lose the intersegmental motion of those two links. The motion that used to occur between those two links is transferred to the adjacent links, causing them to fail prematurely. Too little motion in one spot, leads to too much motion in another.

Now let's think about how this relates to your spine. Your spine is a bio-mechanical chain. Each vertebra needs to move its fair share in order to stay healthy. Too little motion (hypomobility) in one spot leads to too much motion (hypermobility) in another. A person's (static) alignment of the spine is not as important as the (dynamic) intersegmental motion. If a person is having a problem with his/her spine, it is critical that this intersegmental motion be assessed by a skilled chiropractor. If a problem exists, it must be corrected as soon as possible to avoid further damage. Although one can take drugs to cover the pain, and one can stretch and rehabilitate the muscles of the spine, until one restores the proper intersegmental motion of the vertebrae that are fixated or "locked up," one will only be addressing a small part of the problem. The longer that a joint stays fixated, the more damage that will occur to the nerves and soft tissues around the joint, and the harder it will be to get the vertebrae unfixated and moving properly again.

Shortly after a vertebra gets fixated, it begins to undergo a process known as "immobilization degeneration." The facet joints, discs, ligaments and muscles begin to calcify between the adjacent vertebrae. Essentially one's body says, "If we're not going to use it, then let's just fuse it!" When this happens, the very sensitive nerves exiting between the vertebrae get irritated and a whole myriad of symptoms develop. Typically, this is when the pain begins. Perhaps you've heard the old saying, "Pain is the last thing to show up and the first thing to go away." This is very true for spinal conditions.

It is my job as a chiropractor to examine your spine and other joints in your body and to keep them moving properly. Think of it as "spinal hygiene." Proper motion is the key to a healthy spine.

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