

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Chiropractic Approach to Pain Relief, Rehabilitative Care

Depending on the patient's individual needs, a doctor of chiropractic will develop a program of care that may combine more than one type of treatment instead of using drugs and surgery. The treatment plan may include spinal manipulation, mobilization, or massage, as well as procedures such as electric stimulation, rehabilitative exercises, advice on nutrition, and suggestions for posture modification.

Let's look at each of these treatment options a bit more closely.

Spinal manipulation

Chiropractic spinal manipulation is a "hands-on" approach in which doctors of chiropractic manually adjust spinal structures in an attempt to restore back mobility.

Acupuncture

During this procedure, adapted from Chinese medicine, specific body parts are pierced with very fine needles in an attempt to relieve pain. People use acupuncture for various types of conditions that result in pain. Back pain is the most commonly reported use, followed by joint pain, neck pain, and headache.

Electric stimulation

Although many types of electrical therapy treat pain, doctors of chiropractic often use a small device is often used that sends low-voltage electrical current through the skin, using electrodes (small, flat adhesive discs) placed near the source of the pain.

Heat and ice

Ice packs and heat pads are among the most commonly used treatments for musculoskeletal injuries. Ice treatment is most effective for acute injuries. If you have a recent injury (within the past 48 hours), ice packs can help minimize swelling. On the other hand, heat treatments should be used for chronic con-



ditions to help relax and loosen tissues, and to stimulate blood flow to the area.

It is unnecessary to apply either heat or ice for more than 20 minutes at a time. In fact, ice used for too long a period can cause frostbite. Ice and heat should always be applied with at least a towel between the ice/heat and the patient.

Joint mobilization

Joint mobilization consists of small passive movements, usually applied as a series of gentle stretches in a smooth, rhythmic fashion to individual joints. Joint mobilization has been shown to improve mobility, as well as assist in relieving pain and releasing tension from areas such as the head, neck, ankles, feet, pelvis, wrists, ribs, and spine.

Myofascial release

Myofascial release is a highly specialized stretching technique used in an attempt to end pain and restore joints' range of motion by focusing on fascia, a type of connective tissue that covers organs, muscles, and other soft internal structures. Similarly, a chiropractic office may employ Active Release Technique® (ART), Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) stretching, or trigger-point therapy. Instrument-assistant mobilization is also offered through Graston Technique®, ASTYM, etc.

Chiropractic rehabilitation programs often combine several types of treatments, such as manipulation, massage and nutrition advice as opposed to using drugs and surgery.

Supplements and herbal remedies

It's important to note that some medications may interact with supplements or herbs to produce side effects. Some supplements or herbs may interfere with absorption of prescription medications. Talk to your doctor of chiropractic about any supplements and medications you take, to rule out possible negative interactions.

Orthotics

Orthotics are custom-designed shoe inserts that may help to correct an abnormal or irregular walking pattern.

Posture modifications

Good posture helps us stand, walk, sit, and lie in positions that place the least strain on supporting muscles and ligaments during movement. Your doctor of chiropractic can assist you with proper posture, including recommending exercises to strengthen your

core postural muscles. He or she can also assist you with choosing proper postures during your activities that may help to reduce your risk of injury.

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications

Patients often rely on OTC medications to treat acute and chronic pain, but they should always check with a doctor first. Certain medicines, even those sold over the counter, are unsafe during pregnancy, may conflict with other medications, may cause side effects including drowsiness, or may lead to liver damage.

Post-injury rehabilitation

After the reduction of your pain or ache, your doctor of chiropractic may design an individual program that will include a series of rehabilitative exercises performed both in the office and at home to strengthen and stretch the affected muscles, ligaments, and tendons. Your doctor's goal is to provide you with lasting pain relief and to educate you on how to prevent recurrence of the problem. ■

Sources

Your Total Health, <http://yourtotalhealth.ivillage.com>

Spine Universe, www.spineuniverse.com

Spine-Health, www.spine-health.com

Low Back Pain Fact Sheet, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit ACA's website at www.acatoday.org/patients.