

Chiropractic

The basic principle of chiropractic is that spinal adjustments can improve many health problems that are related to the nerves, skeleton and muscles. Problems such as spinal conditions can be helped, and it can also assist to improve a person's general state of health and wellness.

Spinal joints that are not working properly can irritate the nervous system. Chiropractors use manual treatments, referred to as spinal adjustments, to realign the joints of the spine. Once the mechanical structure of the spine is working properly, the body is able to maintain its own health and wellbeing.

History of chiropractic treatment

Spinal alignment has been used as a healing technique for thousands of years, but the modern version was developed in the late 19th century. Chiropractic is recognised as a genuine health care approach and many studies worldwide have proved it to be effective.

A range of disorders

Scientific studies have shown chiropractic can be helpful to assist with a range of disorders, including:

- Asthma
- Back injuries
- Headaches
- Lower back pain
- Migraines
- Period pain
- Problems with posture
- Sciatica (shooting pains in the leg)
- Slipped disc
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears).

A number of studies have also shown chiropractic care can be of benefit to treat asthma; however, a recent wide-ranging review for the acclaimed Cochrane Collaboration found that there was insufficient evidence that such treatment improved asthma symptoms and that more research is needed.

The spine and spinal cord

The backbone or spine is the main support structure of the body. It is curved into a loose 'S' shape and is made up of a series of hollow bones (called vertebrae), one stacked on top of the other. Spongy discs cushion each vertebra. Each disc, and the vertebra immediately above and below, form what is called a spinal motion unit. The structure of the spine means that it is strong yet flexible, while also protecting the spinal cord. Nerves branch out from the spinal cord through holes in every spinal motion unit to service every part of the body.

Nerve irritation

In chiropractic theory, the spine is the key to a person's wellbeing. A spinal motion unit that does not allow its vertebra to move properly can irritate a nerve. The parts of the body serviced by that nerve, including blood vessels, internal organs and limbs, might then be affected. By gently adjusting any misaligned vertebra and restoring normal movement within the spine, the irritation of the nerve may be reduced and balance is restored.

A poorly moving spinal motion unit can also interfere with correct muscle tension and may result in muscle pain. Standing for long periods puts a great strain on the spine, which means that pain – particularly in the lower back – is a common problem.

There are various methods of adjustment

Typically, the practitioner will diagnose your problem by asking you about your condition and completing a physical examination. This may involve watching how you stand and move, feeling your spine, head and pelvis, and requesting x-rays.

You may be adjusted while standing, sitting, lying down or in combination – it depends on your symptoms. You can sometimes hear a clicking or clunking sound as the spinal joints are adjusted, but this is usually painless. There are a number of different methods of adjustments that use various degrees of hand pressure and specialised equipment, including:

- Using the hands to press or push
- Positioning the body to use gravity and the body's own weight
- Using an instrument called an Activator™
- Placing wedges placed under the body and using the body's own weight
- Using specialised adjusting tables to assist the adjustments
- Using slow and sustained hand pressure or swifter movements.

Special considerations

If you have specific health conditions or other issues, the chiropractor will take them into account when deciding on your treatment. These assessments help the chiropractor to evaluate any special needs you may have and to ensure your safety and comfort during treatment. These issues may include:

- Whether you have signs of or diagnosed arthritis
- Any suspected or recent fractures, bone breaks or trauma
- Disorders of the circulation
- Whether you are, or have recently been, pregnant
- Your body size
- Your age – whether you are young, elderly or frail
- The medication that you are taking
- Previous treatment, including operations.

Where to get help

- Registered chiropractor
- Chiropractors Registration Board of Victoria Tel. (03) 9639 8652
- Chiropractors' Association of Australia

Things to remember

- Chiropractic is an effective treatment for back pain and injury.
- The underlying theory is that a properly aligned spine allows the body to maintain its own health.
- The adjustments usually feel good.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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