

The Unfortunate Thing About Chiropractic

by Todd Fiorentino

For every person that I meet who has been helped by chiropractic, there is another that it did nothing for or who even had an adverse reaction to the treatment. This leads me to believe there is a smaller sub-set of the population who would be helped by chiropractic, but, that chiropractors are attempting to treat a much wider group.

I have written about the problems of funneling healthcare through a capitalist system before so I won't belabour that point, though certainly this is playing into it. Any chiropractor who says they want to see you three times per week, which is relatively common, you would do well to question. Chiropractors are famous for this sort of over-treatment.

But the most unfortunate thing about chiropractic is that it does not do what they claim. Here's why: Chiropractors claim to be straightening your vertebrae in the same fashion as a dentist straightens your teeth. Nothing could be further from the truth. Chiropractors are actually taking your joints beyond normal range of motion.

If this sounds like a questionable goal—you're starting to see the light! The cracking sound that you hear during high-velocity manual thrust manipulations (which are distinct from adjustments) is your joint going past what's normal. Now, there are many techniques used by chiropractors so it may be unfair to concentrate on just one, but this is a common practice. Also, I should note, if your joint has locked up for some reason, an adjustment may be in order.

However, I've noticed that vertebrae click into place on their own during massage. I frequently will hear them move back once I have relaxed the muscles. Your body does this all on its own. It's not because I am manipulating the joint and bone, but rather, because I am taking the tension off, which was pulling the vertebrae out of place.

Your body is in a state of dynamic equilibrium or dynamic tension. If a muscle tenses on the right side, the opposing muscle on the left must stretch to accommodate. The same is true for front/back processes.

If you manipulate a joint and the muscles are still tight, it will just be pulled out of place again soon after. That's probably why chiropractors want to see you three times per week, because they know this and don't seem to have the patience or desire to do a couple of hours of deep muscle work, which is likely what you need.

In this sense, massage therapists are sort of the manual laborers of the alternative health field. I think it's fair to say that we have the least training and work the hardest. Doctors of osteopathy (D.O.'s) on the other hand, have a medical degree matched with chiropractic training although they use different terminology from a chiropractor.

D.O.'s are wonderful in my opinion because they just have far more tools at their disposal. Think of it. They can order x-rays, do adjustments, make referrals, practice anything ranging from cranial sacral therapy to homeopathy and injections. Plus, they are medical doctors, which means they are grounded in less theoretical applications.

When I say the terminology is different, what I mean is that D.O.'s don't speak of subluxations like chiropractors. It's important to realize that a chiropractor and doctor

will look at the same x-ray and the chiropractor will say there's subluxations and a medical doctor or D.O. will not. This is why educating yourself is critical.

Have you ever noticed that chiropractors may take x-rays before treatment but almost never x-ray afterward? Why is this? A medical doctor can show you a fracture on an x-ray, but chiropractors can't seem to show you these vague subluxations they speak of. If chiropractors are truly moving vertebrae into position, why not show clients post-treatment x-rays?

Yet, in defense of alternative health, including chiropractic, it's worth noting that if Western medicine were truly good at eliminating pain without bad side effects, the holistic health movement probably would've never caught on. So I am glad that chiropractors are out there. I just feel that certain techniques like high-velocity thrust manipulations are outdated and outmoded.

When such manipulations are not matched with massage therapy, micro-tears and hypermobility may result. Your muscles actually develop tiny tears and the joints become too mobile and unstable. Sometimes, you want to create a small amount of inflammation to promote healing, but not to the point of tearing muscle.

Soft tissue, which is what stabilizes joints and bones, must be able to do its job. If a manipulation is done and the vertebrae are moved forcibly, the soft tissue surrounding the joint now must reform. Absent massage, it is very difficult to make this substance gelatinous again so that it can reform and stabilize the joint.

So you end up with a hypermobile joint and hardened soft tissue that is still molded around the prior dysfunctional action. It won't be long before you're back in the office. And that may be my primary complaint with chiropractic; it seems that chiropractors offer a kind of indefinite treatment. It goes on and on and on and, well, on!

There are so many factors that play into the stress response/pain process that this over-focus on one element, that is, the structural element, is really a disservice to clients. Pain is complex. In fact, structural problems do not inevitably lead to pain. There are many perfectly aligned people in pain and many malaligned people who aren't. A chiropractor would say it's only a matter of time or point to energy levels, but it's just not that simple.

I commend chiropractors who are working with massage therapists and branching out, trying different techniques. Emotional factors, poor diet/lack of exercise, chemical triggers and just excess sympathetic input or stress all can create pain, anxiety and inefficient nervous system patterning. Limiting thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, I believe, are behind many pain processes.

But there is something deeper here, too. The practice of manual thrust manipulations done by chiropractors is not a loving way to approach the human body. Your body reacts positively to loving soothing touch. Pain-killing endorphins are released and the nervous system instantly calms as feelings of safety take over. Jolting your body into position accomplishes none of this.

One might say, well surgery is not a loving way to approach the body either, but sometimes it's necessary. I agree. But I don't feel this negates my point. Surgery is a final option. Also, please realize that I write this in the spirit of educating people. I don't have any personal qualm with chiropractors. I'm not in direct competition with them either as we do different things.

I write this with the hope that high-velocity manipulations become a rare treatment for very specific cases. It is also my hope that people learn to understand that manipulations affect the action of joints (function, not structure) much more than alignment.