

## **Don't Let Your Backbone Slide: The Role of the Spine in Your Health and Wellness**

Most of us don't often think about our spines until we experience discomfort. One third of all Ontarians suffers from back pain at any given time, making back pain the primary cause of chronic health problems in the province. Eighty percent of people will experience back pain at some point in their lives, and this number will likely increase as we put more stress on our spines while driving, sitting in front of computers, bending, and lifting. It's no wonder more and more people are asking, "What has my spine done for me lately?"

### What Your Spine Does for You

Your spine does a lot to promote your health and wellness. The spine is made up of thirty-three bones called vertebrae, which are surrounded by muscles and ligaments that support the body's weight and give us strength. Adjacent vertebrae are separated by discs, which act as shock absorbers to cushion the forces associated with walking, jumping, lifting and the basic wear and tear of everyday life. The vertebrae are connected to each other by tiny joints, which make the spine flexible and allow us to bend, reach, turn, and twist. The spine also houses and protects the spinal cord, which is the central highway of the nervous system, from which nerves emerge and travel to reach the body's muscles, joints, skin, and organs.

In order to function properly, our nervous system requires a healthy spine and spinal cord. The spine works best when all its parts are properly aligned and able to move freely. But the stresses of daily living, including poor posture, injuries, improper lifting and carrying techniques, can cause the bones of the spine to shift out of alignment and limit the spine's range of motion, leading to irritation and dysfunction of its joints and nerves. The end result is often pain and stiffness, which can be localized to the back or

may travel into the arms and legs. Back pain has been shown to have negative effects on health by limiting physical activities, impairing concentration, and leading to depression in over a quarter of sufferers [1]. With all this evidence supporting the spine's role in maintaining our health and wellness, it's unfortunate that most back pain sufferers wait up to six months to seek treatment.

#### What You Can Do for Your Spine:

Many people turn to analgesic or over-the-counter medications when back pain strikes. Although these medications can relieve symptoms of discomfort and swelling, they do not treat the source of the pain, which in seventy-five percent of cases is related to pressure on the joints and nerves of the spine due to changes in the alignment and range of motion of the vertebrae [8].

Your chiropractor can help! Drug-free manual therapies, such as chiropractic, have been shown to be the safest and most effective solution for most patients with back pain [2]. Chiropractors are back specialists extensively trained to diagnose and treat the source of your back pain, not just the symptoms. Chiropractors make adjustments to the spine by applying quick, precise, and safe amounts of pressure to the problem areas. This momentarily separates the joints of the spine, relieving the pressure on the joints and surrounding nerves. Sometimes adjustments are accompanied by a popping sound, which occurs due to the release of a gas bubble when the pressure between two joints is relieved. Chiropractic adjustments are not painful and often provide immediate relief.

Doctors of chiropractic are committed to preventing back pain and related disorders by providing comprehensive spine care and advising their patients on how to live healthier lives [4]. They are trained to recommend stretches, aerobic and strengthening exercises, dietary and injury-prevention advice, as well as relaxation strategies, to prevent disease

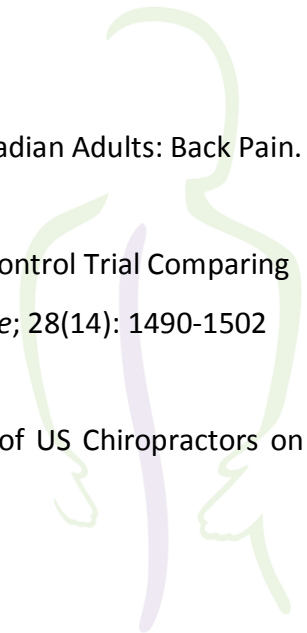
and promote wellness [3, 4]. Recent evidence suggests that chiropractic back care programs can prevent back pain and injuries [5], and that implementing chiropractic health promotion and prevention strategies may reduce the number of medical visits in patients over that age of sixty-five [9].

#### 10 Tips for Keeping Your Back Healthy

1. Stretch and exercise regularly.
2. Follow a healthy diet.
3. Maintain good posture.
4. Stretch your back before and after sports.
5. Don't overload your backpack, purse, or shoulder bag.
6. Stretch your legs and back after each hour of sitting.
7. Never cradle the phone between your neck and shoulder.
8. Sleep on your back or side, but not on your stomach.
9. Invest in a good chair, pillow, and mattress. It's worth it!
10. Have regular spinal check-ups.

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