

# 21 Ways to be a Savvy Chiropractic Patient

Is it time to call a chiropractor? The right chiropractor can help you cope with back and neck pain, but don't assume that just any chiropractor is the right one for you. Use these suggestions to help you find the right fit and get the most out of your chiropractic visits.

Once you've decided on a chiropractor, consider your first appointment to be like a job interview, to make sure the partnership will be a good fit. (Practical suggestions for finding a chiropractor are toward the end of this piece.)

- See [What to Expect at the First Chiropractic Consultation](#)

Plan to ask your chiropractor these questions at the first visit or consultation:

1. **Do you offer free consultations?** Ask the person who is making your appointment if the chiropractor offers a free consultation so you will know if the rest of your questions will be answered at no expense to you. If your chiropractor does not offer a free initial consultation, it is not necessarily a reason to cross him or her off your list, but it never hurts to ask.
2. **Do you treat conditions other than neuromusculoskeletal problems that have a mechanical origin?** Be on guard for any chiropractor who claims he or she can cure ear infections, colic, asthma, and any other systemic problems. An editor of the New England Journal of Medicine put it best: "That spinal manipulation is somewhat effective symptomatic therapy for some patients with acute low back pain is, I believe, no longer in dispute, but there appears to be little evidence to support the value of spinal manipulation for non-musculoskeletal conditions. For this reason, I think it is currently inappropriate to consider chiropractic as a broad-based alternative to traditional medical care."<sup>1</sup>
  - See [Chiropractic Services Beyond Adjustments](#)
3. **Did you acquire any post-graduate degrees?** If your chiropractor has a post-graduate degree or special training in treating your condition, it's a good sign that he or she may be well-qualified to treat your specific problem.
  - See [Chiropractor Educational Requirements](#)

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4. **How much experience do you have treating my particular condition?** Don't take it for granted that your chiropractor is great at what he or she does. No matter how much the chiropractor has studied your specific condition, the amount of real, hands-on experience is what matters the most.
5. **What is your technique?** Some chiropractors prefer a more forceful manipulation which may offer immediate relief, while others prefer to use a more gentle and gradual approach. Neither technique is necessarily better, but you may be more comfortable with one or the other.
  - See [Questions to Ask About Chiropractic Techniques](#) for more on this topic.
6. **Will you respect my preferences for a treatment plan?** For example, if you prefer mobilization to spinal manipulation (with the crack) will you get any pushback from him or her?
  - Further reading: [Spinal Mobilization: Gentle Chiropractic Techniques](#)
7. **How much experience do you have using the technique you are recommending?** If your chiropractor is recommending a specific technique, e.g. [cold laser therapy](#), [Graston Technique](#), or Activator Technique, ask for training that they have received (and go online to see if this is the recommended amount of training).
8. **How long will my treatment last?** Be wary of chiropractors who put you on a strict treatment plan including an exact time line of how long they think your treatment will take. This may be a sign that they are more interested in making appointments than helping you heal.

Also, be aware of any chiropractor who asks for an up-front lump-sum [payment](#).

9. **Do you take X-rays in the office when necessary?** Be wary of chiropractors who take X-rays in the office regardless of the problem.
  - Further reading: [Getting an Accurate Back Pain Diagnosis](#)
10. **What services do you provide?** Ideally, the chiropractor can provide adjunctive therapy such as massage therapy, physical therapy, and nutritional counseling under one roof. If these services are not available in the actual clinic, ask the chiropractor if he or she works with other professionals in these areas, and if you will have help coordinating your care.
11. **What are the top 3 things I can do to get the best results?** A good chiropractor will have an effective, personal treatment plan designed just for you. Make sure your chiropractor has your best interest in mind by asking him or her to outline a specific and detailed plan of action.

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- Read more: [Chiropractic Treatment Plan](#)
12. **What are the estimated costs?** Before you agree to the chiropractor's treatment plan, ask him or her to estimate the total cost. It can be difficult to decide whether or not the costs are competitive, but at least you will know what you can expect to pay. Consider calling around to other clinics to compare costs. You could even post on our [chiropractic forum](#) to see what other community members are paying for their treatments.
  13. **How is billing handled?** You may have to submit your own claims, which can become cumbersome. Some insurance will only cover certain procedures. If a procedure is not covered, many clinics will offer discounts for cash payments. Ask how the clinic will handle procedures that are not covered by your insurance.
  14. **Do you have references?** Don't be afraid to ask the chiropractor to give you references. Any professional who is proud of his or her work will be happy to offer you the opportunity to speak with happy clients. Follow up with phone calls to the patients to ask about their experience with the particular chiropractor. (According to HIPAA, it is illegal in the United States for any doctor to give out names of patients, but he can ask patients to sign a release.)
  15. **Under what circumstances would I need to see a different practitioner or spine specialist?** If you fail to improve under the chiropractor's care, you will probably need to see a specialist. Does your chiropractor acknowledge this and agree? At what point will he or she decide it is time to refer you to a specialist?
    - You can learn more about how to know it's time to see a specialist by referring to [When to See a Surgeon for Low Back Pain](#)
    - More on what chiropractors treat: [Chiropractic Treatments for Lower Back Pain](#)

Many people who visit our site have already been to see a chiropractor. For those of you who have never seen one, and who are not sure how to go about finding the right chiropractor for you, consider this practical advice:

16. **Ask friends and family for a recommendation.** It goes without saying that this is the gold standard we all use to find a best babysitter, restaurant, etc. For me personally, I have a handful of friends I can always trust for great recommendations because we have similar values and standards.
17. **Get insider information.** Doctors may have the advantage of "insider" information. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor what he or she has heard about a particular chiropractor. While your doctor may

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not want to "bad mouth" any other professional in the area, you can take note of his or her non-verbal cues if you ask about a certain chiropractor.

18. **Google the chiropractor.** Hopefully, all you will see are his or her published marathon times, but if he or she has been in trouble with the law, you will most certainly find it on Google.

### *Looking for a Chiropractor?*

[Find a Chiropractor](#) in  
Spine-health's growing  
Chiropractic Directory.

19. **Check if the chiropractor is licensed to practice by your state.** Before a chiropractor can become licensed to practice, he or she must pass rigorous state and national exams. Go to the [Chiropractic Licensing Boards website](#) to look up a chiropractor by name. Or you could rely on Spine-health's database, which does a thorough check on all listed chiropractors.
20. **Check to see if he or she accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education** (or a similar association in countries outside the U.S.): [www.cce-usa.org](http://www.cce-usa.org).
21. **Has he or she been disciplined by the state?** There are enough chiropractors to choose from. If the one you are considering has been disciplined by any board, find someone else: [www.healthguideusa.org](http://www.healthguideusa.org).

A little extra work can go a long way when you are choosing a chiropractor. These practical guidelines can set you in the right direction for making the best choice.

- Further reading: [How To Select The Best Chiropractor](#)

#### Reference:

1. *Shekelle PG. "Editorial: What role for chiropractic in healthcare?" New England Journal of Medicine, 339(15):1074-1075, 1998.*



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