



Chiropractic care has kept Albert McCann's back pain to a minimum.

Photograph by Dutertre2

Well adjusted

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About 80 percent of U.S. adults have at some point been bothered by back pain. The Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center recently surveyed more than 14,000 subscribers who had lower-back pain in the past year but had never had back surgery. More than half said pain severely limited their daily routine for a week or longer, and 88 percent said it recurred through the year. Many said the pain interfered with sleep, sex, and efforts to maintain a healthy weight.

Back pain can be tough to treat. Most of our respondents tried five or six different treatments. They rated the helpfulness of the treatments tried and their satisfaction with the health-care professionals visited.

Hands-on therapies were among the top-rated. Fifty-eight percent of those who tried chiropractic manipulation said it helped a lot, and 59 percent were "completely" or "very" satisfied with their chiropractor. Massage and physical therapy were close runners-up.

Many of those who tried spinal injections found them to be very helpful, although the techniques their doctors used varied. Most respondents had used some type of medication. Forty-five percent of those who took prescription drugs said they helped a lot, double the percentage of those who said they were helped by over-the-counter medications.

Who helped the most?

The percent of people highly (completely or very) satisfied with their back-pain treatments and advice varied by practitioner visited.

Professional	Highly satisfied
Chiropractor	59%
Physical therapist	55
Acupuncturist	53
Physician, specialist	44
Physician, primary care	34

Differences in Ratings for physical therapists and acupuncturists were not statistically significant.