

# Healthy Living

*Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association*

## Visiting a Doctor of Chiropractic: What to Expect

**Perhaps back pain** has been troubling you. Or maybe pain in a shoulder, hip, or leg is negatively affecting your quality of life. You start looking into options for relief. But you soon realize that some options come with serious trade-offs. Surgery, for example, makes permanent changes to the body and is not always successful. Drugs prescribed for musculoskeletal conditions tend only to numb rather than heal pain. And long-term use of such medications may lead to overuse and addiction.



### Selecting a Doctor of Chiropractic

A friend, family member, or co-worker may suggest chiropractic as a conservative, natural alternative to more drastic methods of dealing with musculoskeletal pain. Such a referral is a good place to start. Most satisfied chiropractic patients are glad to share their own positive experiences and to speak favorably about chiropractic's drug- and surgery-free approach to health. Doctors of Chiropractic (DCs) treat more than 27 million Americans (adults and children) annually.

### What Does Chiropractic Do?

Restricted or reduced joint range of motion causes much of the pain typical of musculoskeletal conditions that do not require surgical interventions. These are the conditions that doctors of chiropractic treat most successfully. DCs focus on increasing joint range of motion to normal and reducing pain. They do this by manipulating affected joints, including joints of the spine. Other treatments include therapeutic ultrasound, electrical muscle stimulation, ice and heat, traction, soft-tissue massage, and rehabilitative exercises. DCs are also trained to provide nutritional, dietary and lifestyle counseling to enhance overall health and prevent injury.

### Diagnosing the Problem

Doctors of chiropractic will ask questions about your health and the condition that brought you to the clinic as part of the diagnostic process. A DC may x-ray those patients who require it. A major reason for an x-ray is to determine the health of your musculoskeletal system and to see if your body has developed any serious conditions that should be managed by another provider. Feel free to question your DC about the need for x-rays in your case.

The DC will use the history, the physical examination, and diagnostic studies to arrive at a specific diagnosis. The right diagnosis allows the doctor of chiropractic to determine whether your condition or pain is likely to respond to chiropractic care. You can expect the DC to tell you what your diagnosis is, what the chiropractic treatment plan is, and the

anticipated length of time that it will take to bring your body back to health.

Your doctor will work hard to get you out of the office and functioning independently as quickly as possible. The extent and duration of your problems coupled with the hands-on nature of chiropractic treatments may require numerous visits.

Some conditions heal faster and better with collaboration. For that reason, your DC may team up with another health care provider such as your primary care physician, a physical therapist or a neurologist to gain the benefit of combined expertise.

### Treatment and Results

If you and your doctor of chiropractic agree that chiropractic could help, you will receive your first chiropractic adjustment. Patients are typically asked to lie on a specially designed table. The DC most often uses his or her hands to manipulate the joints of the body, particularly the spine, to reduce pain and restore or enhance joint function.

Reactions to chiropractic treatments are different, just as patients are different. Some patients will find that the affected joints feel a little achy by the next day. That feeling will pass. On the other hand, many patients feel immediate relief following chiropractic treatment. It may take others two to three weeks before they achieve substantial progress.

Many factors can affect the healing process. These include the possibility that the patient is suffering from a chronic problem or pain. Smoking can also delay pain relief.

Your doctor of chiropractic may give you instructions on certain activities or procedures to conduct at home. These may include ice or heat application, avoidance of certain activities or positions, and home exercises and/or stretches. It's important for patients to do their part to bring about positive change and healing. Following the treatment plan is integral to working with your doctor of chiropractic. Patients who actively take responsibility for their health will heal faster than those who expect their doctors to do it all.

### Prevention

Joint manipulation is a wonderful non-invasive procedure in the hands of a skilled DC. It has been repeatedly shown to reduce pain and help patients function better in daily life. A DC can also help you prevent musculoskeletal system problems by teaching you how to engage in regular exercise, maintain good posture, and practice good nutrition and good habits.

## For the First-Time Patient

The first-time patient may want answers to the following questions before making an appointment with a specific doctor of chiropractic (DC):

- 1 Did this doctor graduate from a chiropractic college accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE)? Go to [www.cce-usa.org](http://www.cce-usa.org). (The CCE is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.)
- 2 There are 77,000 DCs in the U.S. who are required to pass a series of four national board exams and be state licensed. Is the DC you are considering licensed in your state? Visit [www.fclb.org](http://www.fclb.org). Click on "Chiropractic Boards." Similar information for medical doctors is at [www.docboard/aim](http://www.docboard/aim).
- 3 Not sure if a chiropractor is right specialist to treat your back pain or neck pain? Learn more about chiropractic and chiropractors, including [chiropractic care for back pain](#), [chiropractic adjustments](#), and [how to select a good chiropractor](#). View a full range of topics in our [Chiropractic Health Center](#). All chiropractors listed on [Spine-health are verified](#) to ensure all medical licensing requirements are met and that each doctor is in good standing in his or her state of practice



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit ACA's website at [www.acatoday.org/patients](http://www.acatoday.org/patients).

This patient information page is a public service of the American Chiropractic Association. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for a diagnosis by a specialist. For specific information concerning your health condition, consult the Doctors of Chiropractic at [Life in Motion Chiropractic and Wellness](#).