

Ten things everyone should know about
Chiropractic Health Care

The Chiropractic Handbook

Patrick D. McLaughlin

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Introduction

I am unaware of any other health care field that requires as much *patient information* as the field of chiropractic. Being involved with chiropractic health care since 1986, I found myself answering the same questions on a daily basis. As a result, this book was created with its main intent to accurately educate the public on the fundamental principles of chiropractic care.

My motivation for writing this book was inspired by all of the patients that I have had the privilege to serve since 1990. I would like to thank Maria, my wife, for her support and encouragement. Gail McLaughlin, my mother, has assisted with this project through two editions with her expertise in typesetting and editing. This book is a direct reflection of my view on chiropractic health care as influenced by the schooling that I have had, the doctors that I have learned from, and the patients that I have served and continue to serve.

To all who have impacted my life and have been influential in my development as a person and doctor, thank you.

Patrick D. McLaughlin, D.C.
Author, *The Chiropractic Handbook*
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Foreword

So many things in life are truly gifts from our creator. So few are so simple and so available, simply for our own good, as chiropractic. In the following pages, Dr. McLaughlin has provided insight into these simple principles. Principles that are available to anyone who desires better health through chiropractic. Failure to master the basics of health will give the same result as not understanding the basic elements of auto maintenance. Dr. McLaughlin has identified these basic elements in this book in the same way an automobile comes with an owner's manual.

The human body has certain rules for proper maintenance. Those rules include a healthy spine and nervous system. This book is about those rules. What follows is an attempt to provide the public with a "handbook" for the human body. The pages of this book can change the way you live the rest of your life, because it can help prevent your body from wearing out prematurely. After all, if you wear out your body, where will you live the rest of your life?

Joseph Siragusa, D.C.

1. What is chiropractic?

The number one thing people want to know when they hear about chiropractic is: "What is it?" Most people are (1) somewhat educated about chiropractic, (2) have no idea what chiropractic is about, or (3) tag chiropractic to inaccurate perceptions that still circulate in society.

The answer is here. Chiropractic is the largest drugless health-care system in the world. Chiropractic centers its philosophy on the relationship of structure and function in the human body. Chiropractors (doctors of chiropractic) analyze the human frame and its effect on the nervous system. Chiropractors, more specifically, are the only health-care specialists that detect subluxations (spinal bones that misalign and irritate surrounding nerves). Chiropractic does not use drugs or surgery to alleviate these misalignments. The remedy consists of gentle low-force adjustments performed by the hands of a chiropractor.

People often seek chiropractic care for common symptoms of subluxations such as low back pain, neck pain, headaches, shoulder/arm pain, leg pain (sciatica), and hip pain. Though chiropractic gets excellent results with these symptoms, chiropractic is more than purely a pain-relief treatment. Chiropractic health care is a way of life designed to enable the body to function as close to 100% as possible. Chiropractic's main focus is making people healthier and once there, keeping them that way.

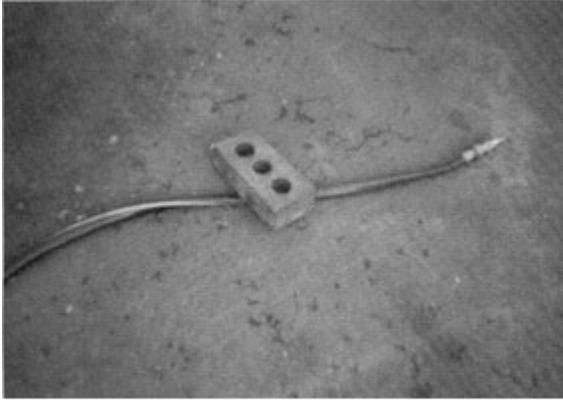
Understanding the logic of chiropractic is this book's main emphasis. I sometimes wonder when I hear someone say that they "believe" in chiropractic if they really understand its logic. Chiropractic health care is not a "belief" that ranks behind the Tooth Fairy and Easter Bunny. It is not a mystical power that by chance gets human beings well. It is a health-care system based on the common sense that the human body performs best when there is no nerve pressure. Understanding that misaligned spinal bones can choke off nerves and decrease the body's ability to function 100% is vital information. By understanding these concepts, this book has already served its purpose.



Similar to a kinked wire that affects the performance of an appliance, subluxations can choke off nerves and affect the body's health potential.

2. When did chiropractic begin?

Technically, as we know it today, chiropractic began on September 18, 1895 when a man named D. D. Palmer restored the hearing of a deaf janitor in Davenport, Iowa by adjusting his spine. **Yes, you did read this *Correctly*.** It was deafness that responded to the first chiropractic adjustment! Not low back pain, headaches, or an injury from a horse and buggy accident. The subluxated bone caused nerve interference to the blood vessels of the man's ears, resulting in deafness. As a result of D. D. Palmer's study of anatomy and the janitor's recollection of a snapping in his back associated with the loss of hearing, D. D. Palmer founded chiropractic. Chiropractic is derived from the Greek words meaning, "to practice by hand."



As a brick on a hose will decrease water flow, misaligned bones will decrease nerve flow throughout the body.

Actually, similar forms of spinal adjusting (also known as spinal manipulation) date to the Egyptians (present on hieroglyphics).

Hippocrates (who lived between 300 and 400 B.C.) gave mention to the importance of the spine by saying, "obtain knowledge of the spine, for this is the cause of many diseases." (Hippocrates was known as the father of medicine.) The Greeks and Romans show records of spinal adjusting as well. In summary, though chiropractic has been around technically for about 100 years, it has been practiced in similar forms for thousands of years.

3. How much education does a chiropractor need?

This might surprise you. A chiropractor receives a comparable education to that of a general medical practitioner. To earn the Doctorate of Chiropractic degree (abbreviated D.C.), one must first satisfy the pre-professional requirements, which vary state to state. (This varies from a bachelor's degree, to two years of college with a pre-medical background). From there, acceptance to an accredited chiropractic college is necessary. (There are approximately fifteen colleges worldwide.) Chiropractic school consists of four academic years. This schooling is very similar to obtaining a medical degree in class hours, attended laboratories, and types of classes. However, instead of learning about drugs and surgery, chiropractic education focuses on spinal adjusting procedures and other natural healing procedures, such as nutritional counseling). Chiropractic students spend their last year of school in an internship program designed to prepare them for the day-to-day clinical setting. Chiropractors are required to be certified in three separate national board examinations. Most states also require a separate examination that must be passed. Upon completion of all these requirements, chiropractors are then granted licenses. In order to maintain a license, chiropractors must take a certain amount of continuing education each year. (This varies by the state.)

- In summary, in order for a doctor to practice chiropractic in North Carolina, he/she must complete the following:
- Receive a four-year Bachelor's degree with a pre-medicine background (two years of chemistry, one year of physics, and one year of biology).
- Receive a four-year Doctor of Chiropractic degree from an accredited chiropractic college.
- Must have successfully completed a chiropractic internship. Must have passed the three National Board examinations. Must have passed the North Carolina State Chiropractic Board examination.
- Must have taken at least two weekend seminars within the last year to maintain his/her license.



The chiropractic degree involves between six and eight years of study, depending on state requirements. The Doctor of Chiropractor degree is a four-year program upon completion of pre-requisites. In North Carolina, a Bachelor's degree is also required to practice.

4. Do we take care of the newborn and the elderly?

Chiropractors can impact the lives of anyone with a spine who is alive. This obviously includes newborn babies and the severely arthritic elderly. Most people are amazed that chiropractors take care of children. They ask, "Does the baby have back pain?" The answer is, "of course not." The baby, however, could be subluxated. Knowing subluxations rob the body's ability to perform, children need to be checked as soon as possible. The birthing process has proven to be a very traumatic experience at times, especially to the cervical spine (neck). During a natural vaginal delivery, the baby's neck can be stretched up to twice its normal length. Up to 120 lbs. of pressure can be exerted on the baby's neck from the doctor. Subluxations can start right there!! During the first 18 months of life, the very important curves in the spine are developed. This is another great time to get children checked. During the early years, subluxations are commonly caused by the many different activities and falls they endure. During adolescence, scoliosis is a very common condition that needs to be checked. If associated with subluxations, correcting this is possible while the bones are still developing. Besides scoliosis, ear infections, headaches, bedwetting, neck pain, and back pain are the most common effects of subluxations in children. The main benefit of checking children is that the earlier they are checked, the greater the likeliness they will not suffer later in life. Another benefit is that children respond quickly to chiropractic care. The younger patient responds quickly due to faster healing time, responsive ligaments, and the absence of spinal decay.



Children can be subluxated as well as adults and benefit from chiropractic care

On the other end of the spectrum, are the elderly. Can chiropractic help them? Chiropractic can help not only with subluxation correction, but also with delaying the progression of arthritis. Most people think that once they have arthritis, they have to live with it or take medication to relieve pain. This is not necessarily true, especially with the spine. Just like tires that wear out when out of alignment, the spine does the same thing. With the elderly, the adjustment serves the following two purposes: 1) correction of subluxation and 2) delaying the progression of arthritis.

5. Can the body heal itself?

The body can absolutely heal itself, if it has no nerve interference. The power that made the body has the ability to heal the body. Chiropractors call the body's in-born ability to heal itself innate intelligence. This most important function of the body can only express itself 100% when allowed to by having a healthy nervous system.

Innate intelligence is the body's life force expressed by the nervous system. This intelligence instructs the heart to beat an average of seventy-two times per minute as long as we are alive. The lungs are informed to expand eighteen times per minute. The body digests food and with this material creates whatever it needs and expels the waste. This



Similar to a tree, the nervous system helps branch out throughout the body and enables it to heal itself.

intelligence can monitor our needs to survive and adapt to our

environment. When we are vulnerable to disease by having lowered immunity and have cold-like symptoms, the body's innate intelligence takes over. It combats the sickness/bacteria by elevating its temperature (chills and fever) and tries to expel the organisms (vomiting, diarrhea, sneezing, and coughing). Normally people would think of these symptoms as being sick. However, it is the body's natural healthy response to an environmental change.

Innate intelligence is affected directly by the nervous system. Since innate intelligence is directly responsible for the body's ability to perform, chiropractors can positively impact this by insuring that the nervous system is not choked off by spinal misalignments.



When your car is out of alignment, your tires wear out prematurely. The same is true of the human spine.

6. What is the most important system in the body?

The answer is easy--the nervous system. When you were conceived, a sperm cell united with an egg cell forming one cell. This person, **you**, developed from this unification and from that developed a large cluster of cells resembling a ball of grapes. This ball of grapes eventually evolved into the brain, the most important organ in the body. From this, a small tail protruded with tiny extensions. Ultimately these formed the spinal cord and nerves. Attached to these extensions were minute buds, which in time formed every single organ system in the body. In summary, the nervous system forms first and from its direction forms every other system in the body. As a result, the nervous system is known as the master system. It is in charge of all other systems.

How does this system work? The easiest way to explain the nervous system is to compare it to the electrical system of a home. Every home has a generator, which supplies all the power to it. This generator in the human body is the brain. This organ generates the body's energy and gives it life. In the home, the generator is connected to the home by a very long cable. The cable serves as a link between the generator and the sockets installed in the home. The cable in the human body is the spinal cord. It attaches to the brain and



As water runs from the top down to every pipe in the area, the health energy in a human body runs from the top down and inside-out throughout the nervous system.

leads to the individual "sockets" in the body. In a home, there are appliances. These consist of a T.V., stereo, washer, dryer, hair-dryer, refrigerator, etc. The human body consists of many appliances as well. These include the heart, lungs, stomach, intestines, muscles, skin, eyes, immune system, etc. Now, I skipped one key connection. In the home setting, what connects the cable to the appliances? Electrical wires make the connection. In the human body these wires are known as nerves. These wires in the body, nerves, attach to every single appliance in the body. Every single immune gland, stomach cell, muscle and millimeter of skin is supplied by a nerve.

Like an electrical System, current actually runs down these nerves and allows whatever is on the other end to work 100%. By checking the body's sockets (openings created by spinal bones), chiropractors can assist the body's healing ability by eliminating nerve pressure (unkinking the wire).



The nervous system is very similar to an electrical system.

7. What is a subluxation?

The cornerstone of chiropractic revolves around this one word. Pronounced sub-lux-a-tion, the word comes from sub (less than) end luxation (dislocation) to mean literally "less than a dislocation."

In chiropractic, subluxation technically means a vertebrae (spinal bone) that misaligns and results in pinching off a nerve. More than misaligning, these bones in the spine jam into one another and stick together. This usually limits range of motion, can lead to swelling and pain, and if left untreated can accelerate arthritis. The main effect of subluxation is nerve pressure. The nerve can actually be irritated and choked off. Whatever is on the other end of a pinched nerve cannot possibly work 100%. Sometimes, but not always, pain may be associated with a subluxation. (An example of nerve pain would be hitting your funny bone on a table.) Sometimes a nerve may accelerate its activity and result in severe muscle spasm and twitching. Studies have shown that the weight of a quarter on a nerve can diminish the flow through the nerve by 60%. Pain, as mentioned before, is a common side effect of a subluxation and unfortunately is the last thing to surface. This is the reason it is most important for people to be checked regularly for subluxations.

Since nerves travel to every single part of the body, subluxations can directly cause problems to every organ system. Common symptoms that arise from subluxations consist of low-back pain, neck pain, headaches, arm/shoulder pain, hip/leg pain, sciatica, dizziness, and fatigue. Surprisingly to patients, but not chiropractors, other very common symptoms, such as constipation, menstrual cramps, repetitive ear infections, asthma, and kidney infections may be caused by subluxations, which rob the associated organs of their vital nerve supply.

What causes these subluxations? These subluxations are caused by one of two things: (1) macrotrauma or (2) microtrauma. Macrotrauma deals with large, one-time traumatic incidents. Examples include work injuries, automobile accidents, and athletic injuries. A specific example would be someone who falls off the roof of a house. Microtrauma consists of smaller, repetitive actions that occur over time. Long distance driving, constant phone usage, working on the computer, and improper sleep positions are several examples of microtrauma. Mainly due to the fact that society does not know how to care for their spines, microtrauma is the leading cause of subluxations.

How do chiropractors analyze for subluxations? Chiropractors are trained extensively to detect subluxations with the use of their hands. By motioning each individual joint in the spine, chiropractors can differentiate whether the joint or bone is moving smoothly or is twisted and disjointed. If the joint is twisted and jammed, it is subluxated. Due to the lack of motion, there is resultant nerve irritation to some degree. Chiropractors selectively use x-rays to determine the severity of subluxation, alignment of the spine, and to rule out abnormalities or other problems. A thorough case history, orthopedic, and neuralgic examination is also performed to attain a complete assessment. With these tools, the chiropractor can accurately diagnose whether the patient is subluxated, which spinal bones are subluxated, and to what degree the bones are subluxated.

8. Aren't chiropractors "back doctors"?

No, chiropractors are technically nervous system doctors. Due to the fact the nervous system runs down the spine, this is our main area of concern. If the nervous system ran through the left elbow, most people would probably refer to us as "left elbow doctors."



One of the most important parts of a building is it's foundation. The same is true of the spine with its sacro-iliac joints.

The spine is our focus in that it is the main area in the body to misalign and cause resultant nerve pressure. The spine, at birth, consists of thirty-three, bones called vertebrae. By adulthood these bones will shrink down to twenty-six in total due to the fusion of nine bones into two (the sacrum and coccyx). These twenty-six bones give the body support, provide the majority of the body's height, and most importantly protect the very delicate spinal cord. The spine along with the skull were designed to be very dense and sturdy to encase the nervous system.

These vertebrae are like building blocks in that each one is stacked on one another. In viewing the spine from behind, these blocks should be aligned one on top of the other. The strongest the spine will be in this view will be straight up and down. Scoliosis (crooked spine) wreaks havoc on the spine due to the weakness it possesses by not being straight. (Chiropractic health care is the best strategy for scoliosis if caught early enough.) The spine from the side view should be curved. Like bridges and large buildings, curves are important to maintain strength. The same is true

with the spine from this angle. When these curves are lost or exaggerated (hunch-back, sway-back, and straight-neck), the spine is weak and vulnerable to injury.

The spine is further separated into sections. The neck (cervical spine) consists of seven unique bones. The mid-back (thoracic spine) consists of twelve bones each attached to a pair of ribs. The low-back (lumbar spine) consists of five bones. The pelvis consists of two iliac bones and the sacrum (the bone you sit on). The coccyx (tailbone) is connected at the end of the spine.

The bones are separated from each other by discs. These are cushions between the bones. They act like jelly doughnuts in that there is a jelly inside and a surrounding cover outside. People often hear about bulging or herniated discs. To make it simple, discs are in either one of three stages: (1) normal, (2) contained herniation (bulged), or (3) non-contained herniation (ruptured). With a bulged disc (contained herniation), chiropractic care has shown to be very effective. A non-contained herniation (rupture) usually necessitates surgery.

The spine in summary is a very complex joint system with approximately 110 joints designed to protect the nervous system. It is also the main area in the body where if structurally altered, can affect the body's health by causing nerve irritation.

9. How does a chiropractor fix these subluxations?

First and foremost, chiropractors do not prescribe medications, give shots, or perform surgery to correct these subluxations. The fact is the only way to correct a vertebral subluxation is by a technique called an adjustment. This adjustment is performed very gently and quickly by the hands of a chiropractor. (The word chi-ro-prac-tic literally means the practice on of hands.) This adjustment has a very pleasant feeling associated with it. Once set up, an adjustment normally takes less than one second to perform. It is often, but not always, associated with a noise. This popping sound, known as a cavitation, is a result of gases released within the joint during the adjustment. It resembles the sound of knuckles popping. In order to adjust the low back, most chiropractors place the patient in a side lying position. The mid-back is very simply adjusted with the patient lying face down. The neck can be adjusted in a variety of ways. Having the patient lying on his/her back or seated are the two most common ways.



To remove subluxations, drugs and surgery are not used. The gentle adjustment, a non-painful maneuver performed by a doctor's hands, correct the subluxation.

Over fifty different chiropractic techniques and methods are employed worldwide to help correct subluxations. Some chiropractic offices will utilize a variety of therapeutic modalities to help assist with the adjustment. These include ultrasound, electrical muscle stimulation, diathermy, ice, heat, and intersegmental traction, to name a few. These at times serve a purpose in decreasing pain, muscle spasm, and swelling, which in turn make it much easier for the doctor to correct the subluxation. Other factors involved include exercise programs, nutritional counseling, stress management, sleep advice, and tips on proper spinal biomechanics. These help avoid future subluxations and help the overall health of the patient.

The main tool in correcting subluxations continues to be the specific chiropractic adjustment. No surgery, shot, pill, physical therapy, modality, acupuncture needle, or exercise will remove a vertebral subluxation. The only viable correction is a very specific non-force chiropractic adjustment designed to remove spinal nerve pressure.

10. Why do I have to keep on coming back?

This has to be the most often discussed topic among those who don't understand the methods of chiropractic care. I heard a joke one time concerning this. How many chiropractors does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is one, but it takes ten visits!! There are two main reasons why people continue to see chiropractors. The first deals with a program of visits that enables patients to get from a painful, weakened state of spinal health to a very strong, rehabilitated, and pain-free state. The second reason of continuation is that most people at this level desire to remain in this state and as a result seek periodic chiropractic care to maintain this condition.

Initial care in a chiropractor's office is usually broken down into two stages. Due to the fact that the patient usually enters the office with some type of discomfort, the first stage usually consists of repetitive visits to free the subluxation and allow the body relief as soon as possible. The pain-relief stage may consist of daily adjustments, and sometimes therapy to help assist with some of the effects of subluxation (muscle spasm, tissue swelling, etc.). The second stage of the initial care deals with rehabilitating the spine. This deals with several adjustments per week for the duration of the healing phase. The body normally heals in six to twelve weeks, depending on the severity of the subluxation. In summary, an initial phase of care with the goals to establish correction and rehabilitation of the subluxations may take daily visits for one to two weeks, and three visits per week for four to ten weeks thereafter. **WHY?** The reason of frequency consists of a soft tissue that connects the bones and joints together. These are called ligaments. Ligaments have a tendency to stretch and sprain during a subluxation. Due to a poor blood supply, they have a tendency to heal slowly. It is because of this fact that initially after an adjustment, the body will revert and go back to its abnormally locked position; it is with repetition that the adjustments will begin to **hold**. These ligaments, like bones and muscles, heal normally within six to twelve weeks. An analogy would be someone with a broken leg. The person normally would have a cast on for four weeks and then a brace on for four weeks. **Why are athletes always out for four to six weeks?** It is because this is the amount of time it takes for proper healing of these tissues. **When a broken bone doesn't hurt any more, why don't they remove the cast?** Obviously because it hasn't healed 100%. Knowing the same things about subluxations, chiropractors base their cases on the same timetables. **Why can't you adjust a subluxation and then put a cast on to hold it in place?** Though it would probably work, it is not practical. Knowing that the ligaments heal properly while under lines of stress, three adjustments weekly normally offer the appropriate frequency in attaining rehabilitation. This concept goes hand in hand with exercise programs that require workouts three times weekly for best results. At the conclusion of initial active care, the doctor normally dismisses the patient as having a rehabilitated, strong, and healthy spine.

At this time, on-going care is presented to maintain the current level of spinal function. One option is maintenance care. This is usually monthly to determine the state of the spine and adjust whatever subluxations are present at that time. Studies show that after rehabilitating part of your body, or by exercising vigorously for a period of time, you can maintain that level of muscle tone by working out one time a



Chiropractic is a stair-step approach to health, designed to remove nerve interference and make people healthier for a lifetime.

month. It is the same concept that applies to maintenance care. Other patients opt for a more aggressive maintenance care (weekly adjustments) to not only reconstruct the spine but also insure the healthiest nervous system possible. Reconstructive care is similar to putting "braces" on the spine. It is less frequent than active care, but lasts for a longer period of time.

People feel better and healthier while under chiropractic care. Once nerve interference is removed by spinal adjustments, the only effects can be positive to the human body. Just like eating nutritious food, sleeping correctly, and exercising frequently contribute to better health, so does consistent chiropractic care. Next time someone asks why do you continue to seek chiropractic care, even after you are pain free, ask the following. Why do people exercise three times a week? Why do people eat fruit, vegetables, and non-fat foods? The answer obviously is that it makes them feel better and healthier. The same is true for periodic chiropractic adjustments. Without subluxations, the body is allowed to perform 100%. **Why do I get my teeth checked twice a year and eyes checked once a year but my spine twelve times a year?** Technically we use our teeth an average of three times a day. Though our eyes are an important organ for senses, it is pretty obvious when it would become necessary to be checked in addition to a regular annual check-up (blurred vision). Reasons included for more frequent chiropractic care are multiple. The first and most important reason is that the spinal cord and all its nerves travel within the spine and exit from every possible opening.

Another reason is that we continuously use our spines repetitively throughout the day. Another deals with the poor hygiene we have for our spine. From consistent poor work habits to bad posture, we as a society wear out our spines. Therefore there is a need for more frequent chiropractic check-ups.

In this author's opinion this is the greatest service a chiropractor provides in his/her office. It is a service that no other health care provider can offer. There is no drug or surgery that you can take once a month to make you healthier. My ultimate vision one day is to have an entire community on lifetime maintenance chiropractic care.