

What You Should Know about Chiropractic Care

by the **Mayo Clinic Staff**

One Adjustment

*Can Leave Ripples
Of Health In Your Body*

Definition

Chiropractic adjustment is a procedure in which trained specialists (chiropractors) use their hands or a small instrument to apply a controlled, sudden force to a spinal joint. The goal of chiropractic adjustment, also known as spinal manipulation, is to correct structural alignment and improve your body's physical function.



Why it's done

Low back pain, neck pain and headache are the most common problems for which people seek chiropractic adjustment.

Risks

Chiropractic adjustment is safe when it's performed by someone trained and licensed to deliver chiropractic care. Serious complications associated with chiropractic adjustment are overall rare, but may include:

A herniated disk or a worsening of an existing disk herniation

Compression of nerves in the lower spinal column (cauda equina syndrome)

A certain type of stroke (vertebral artery dissection) after neck manipulation

Don't seek chiropractic adjustment if you have:

Severe osteoporosis

Numbness, tingling or loss of strength in an arm or leg

Cancer in your spine

An increased risk of stroke

Excessive motion in the spine (instability)

How you prepare

No special preparation is required before a chiropractic adjustment.

Chiropractic treatment may require a series of visits to your chiropractor. Ask your care provider about the frequency of visits and be prepared to work them into your schedule. It might be a good idea to bring your calendar along or have an idea of when in your schedule you can fit in visits to the chiropractic office.

Many health insurance policies cover chiropractic care, but you might want to check to see how many treatments are covered in a given time period.



What you can expect

At your initial visit, your chiropractor will ask questions about your health history and perform a physical exam, with particular attention to your spine. Your chiropractor may also recommend other examinations or tests, such as X-rays.



During the adjustment

During a typical chiropractic adjustment, your chiropractor places you in specific positions to treat affected areas. Often, you're positioned lying face down on a specially designed, padded chiropractic table. The chiropractor uses his or her hands to apply a controlled, sudden force to a joint, pushing it beyond its usual range of motion. You may hear popping or cracking sounds as your chiropractor moves your joints during the treatment session.



Additional therapies

Your chiropractor may recommend other treatment approaches in combination with chiropractic adjustment, such as:

- Heat or ice
- Massage
- Stretching
- Electrical stimulation
- Exercise
- Weight loss

After the adjustment

Some people experience minor side effects for a few days after chiropractic adjustment. These may include headache, fatigue or pain in the parts of the body that were treated.



Results

Chiropractic adjustment can be effective in treating low back pain, although much of the research done shows only a modest benefit — similar to the results of more conventional treatments. Some studies suggest that spinal manipulation also may be effective for headaches and other spine-related conditions, such as neck pain.

Not everyone responds to chiropractic adjustments. A lot depends on your particular situation. If your symptoms don't begin to improve after several weeks of treatments, chiropractic adjustment might not be the best option for you.