

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Pain-Free Does Not Mean Disease- or Injury-Free

“If it’s not broken, don’t fix it” is the attitude most of us have when it comes to home or auto repair. But many people take this mindset one step further and believe that “if I’m not in pain, I don’t have any health concerns that need addressing.” In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Pain, according to Dr. Gravesen, is often the final — not first — sign of a health problem. In many cases, something that could have easily been remedied several days, weeks, months or even years earlier becomes debilitating by the time pain or other symptoms rear their ugly heads.

That’s why Dr. Gravesen promotes the **chiropractic lifestyle**, a way of life that focuses on preventing health problems, rather than merely masking symptoms with medication or waiting for a patient’s pain to signal that there’s something wrong. This lifestyle centers on the correction of dysfunctional areas in the spine called **vertebral subluxations**: the result of restricted or misaligned spinal bones (vertebrae).

Vertebral subluxations are linked with a myriad of health concerns, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches,



backaches, infertility and ear infections. Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

Read on to learn more about why pain is such a faulty indicator of health status.

Whiplash and Vertebral Subluxations

Delayed onset whiplash disorder (DOWAD) is just one example of a potentially asymptomatic (without symptoms) spine injury. Despite the absence of pain, injury may be present and have serious consequences years later.

Whiplash sparks vertebral subluxations along the cervical spine. However, patients may go years before symptoms surface. And, when they do, they may not necessarily be in the neck.

Many DOWAD patients complain of shooting pain in the triceps muscle in the arm. And, depending on the severity of the subluxation, numbness in their thumb, index and middle finger.

The phenomenon is known as “referred” pain. Doctors of chiropractic, like Dr. Gravesen, however, trace pain back to its roots — using a variety of diagnostic methods — instead of covering it up with drugs (*J Musculoskel Med* 2003;20:412-18).



Consequently, it’s essential to get a chiropractic checkup after *every* incident of trauma, such as a fender-bender or fall, no matter how insignificant it may seem at the time.

Spinal Injuries

When it comes to massive injuries that involve the spinal column, researchers at the Vancouver Hospital and Health Sciences Centre, British Columbia, have determined that “fractures [in the spinal column] are not truly asymptomatic but may be masked by other distracting injuries.” They further note that “clinicians and subsequently their patients will always be at risk if this important distinction is forgotten.” (*Can J Surg* 2002;45:21-4.)

Another study reveals that diagnosis of fractures was delayed in a whopping 28 out of 147 patients with acute spinal fractures (*J Trauma* 2004;56:348-55).

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Undetected fractures are one of the many reasons doctors of chiropractic use X-rays and other diagnostic measures when caring for patients — particularly if they've been in a motor vehicle accident or suffered another form of physical trauma.

According to a report, the most serious consequence of overlooked spinal injuries is progressive nerve damage, which may require “surgical intervention that most likely could have been avoidable, often with an unsatisfactory outcome.” (*Clin Orthop Relat Res* 2005;431:93-103.)

Arthritic Degeneration of the Hips

Researchers noted that mild to moderate arthritic degeneration of the hip — as identified by X-ray — was “very frequent and not related to pain.” And while severe change and pain were distinctly linked in the greater population, “In younger males, severe radiographic change is much less likely to be associated with pain.” (*Rheumatology* 2005;44:337-41.)

When researchers analyzed the hip-joint X-rays from 326 pain-free (asymptomatic) patients, they discovered that 20 percent of the subjects had arthritic degeneration (*Postgrad Med* 1979;65:155-9).

Pre-Pain Carpal Tunnel Injury

You may have carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) and not even know it. *Yet*. According to one study, cysts associated with CTS “frequently are seen on routine imaging examinations. They may be clinically asymptomatic or may cause pain, swelling or impaired joint function. They often are associated with underlying joint disorders, such as trauma, degeneration or inflammation.” (*Radiol Clin North Am* 1996;34:395-425.)

Knee Injury

Your knees feel great today: no pain, no stiffness, no problems. Well maybe, maybe not. The 44 volunteers who participated in a recent experiment didn't have any knee pain either. Yet magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) revealed that 43 of the 44 showed evidence of at least *one* abnormality of the meniscal protective tissue in their knees. Worse yet, 27 of the volunteers had abnormalities in at least three of four regions in their knees.

According to those who conducted the study, “Meniscal degeneration or tears, a risk factor for knee osteoarthritis, are highly prevalent in asymptomatic individuals.” (*Osteoarthritis Cartilage* 2005;13:181-6.)

In addition to discovering numerous meniscal tears, researchers found that five individuals showed evidence of cartilage lesions and 12 showed evidence of arthritic changes called osteophytosis.

When researchers in Japan conducted a similar study, their 115 volunteers ranged in age from 13 to 76. MRI test results showed a “considerable prevalence of meniscal abnormalities in asymptomatic Japanese subjects.” (*J Orthop Sci* 2002;7:287-91.) The researchers also noted that the meniscal abnormalities became more prevalent with age in both men and women.

Painless Rotator-Cuff Injury

In evaluating the sonogram results (a process that uses high-frequency sound waves to create images) of 212 pain-free volunteers between the ages of 18 and 85, investigators were surprised to find a complete rupture of the supraspinatus rotator cuff tendon (in the shoulder) in 90 percent of the cases. They also discovered a “higher prevalence in older individuals of rotator cuff tendon tears that cause no pain or decrease in activities of daily living.” (*Eur J Radiol* 2004;51:263-8.)

Chiropractic Before Pain

All of these studies — and the countless others not documented here — reinforce what doctors of chiropractic have long upheld: The absence of pain does not mean the absence of injury or disease. Maintaining proper spinal health through regularly scheduled office visits allows the doctor to identify questionable areas before they become major problems.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that being pain-free means you are injury- or disease-free. Be proactive and practice the chiropractic lifestyle instead.



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