

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

The Chiropractic Solution To Mid-Back Pain

Chiropractic is well known for its ability to relieve neck and low-back pain. But did you know that it also benefits those suffering from mid-back pain?

Mid-back pain ranges from twinges to tenderness and throbbing. Unlike low-back pain, however, which gets lots of press, achy middle backs don't capture as much of the limelight. Until now!

Thoracic Area of the Spine = Mid-Back

When doctors of chiropractic refer to the thoracic region, they are referring to the mid-back: home to the thoracic section of the spine.

The mid-back includes 12 pairs of ribs, 12 spinal bones (vertebrae) — each of which is attached to a rib — and a network of nerves, muscles, tendons and ligaments. These structures protect internal organs, including the heart, lungs, liver and spleen.

Most episodes of mid-back pain result from injury, overuse or misuse. Abnormal spinal alignment or degeneration of normal structure can also lead to mid-back pain. “The precipitating mechanical problem commonly leads to inflammation, and the inflammation causes pain.” (*Harv Health Lett* 1989;15:5.)

Vertebral Subluxations In the Thoracic Region

When spinal bones become misaligned or movement is restricted, the result is a common condition known as *vertebral subluxation*.

Vertebral subluxations are linked with a myriad of health concerns, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches, backaches, infantile colic and ear infections.

The Chiropractic Solution

Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called *chiropractic adjustments*.

During a chiropractic adjustment, Dr. Gravesen slowly moves misaligned vertebrae back into place. This process relaxes the connecting muscles: a vital step in reducing patients' mid-back pain and improving mobility.

Chiropractic adjustments help maintain the integrity of joint cartilage, improve the metabolism of the intervertebral disk and prevent premature degenerative changes (*Neurol Clin* 1999;17:91-111).

Subluxated Ribs

Even ribs can become misaligned. Subluxations in this area often result in “trigger points” of pain, causing the smooth muscles around the ribs to kink and knot. The sharp, jabbing nature of the pain can mimic heart burn or even a heart attack.

Although the possibility of a heart condition must always be considered when symptoms include chest pain, after cardiovascular disease is ruled out, musculoskeletal involvement “may be the underlying cause of the symptoms in certain patients. When this is the case, chiropractic adjustment may provide an effective mode

of treatment.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2003;26:108-15.)

What causes a rib subluxation? Sleeping on the same side night after night may result in this painful condition. Other instigators include everyday activities like coughing, lifting or throwing a ball. Chiropractors gently manipulate the subluxated rib(s) back into place.

Adjustment Addendum

Chiropractic adjustments aren't the only way Dr. Gravesen helps patients overcome mid-back pain. Chiropractors often prescribe specific exercises and may suggest physical therapy. They also provide education on proper ergonomics — in and out of the office — and relaxation techniques.

Ergonomically Speaking

If you want a healthy and pain-free back, pay attention to your posture. Scrunching down in a chair while watching television or slumping over a computer keyboard predisposes the thoracic spine to exaggerated curvatures.



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Vertebral subluxations in the thoracic region may lead to mild or exaggerated curvatures — ranging from a mild roll of the shoulders to a severe “hunchback.”

Even five or ten pounds of excess weight can trigger postural misalignments: particularly abdominal weight, which tends to pull the body forward. High heels, fatigue and aging also take a toll on posture.

Regular exercise encourages good posture. It not only relieves stress, but it also strengthens the spine and improves alignment.

Ask the doctor to suggest an exercise regimen aimed at enhancing posture and strengthening vital muscles (such as your abdominals).

Stress and Mid-Back Pain

A study performed by researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health; and the University of Pittsburgh, included more than 6,000 material handlers in 160 newly opened retail stores.

After adjusting for patient history of back problems and work-related lifting, researchers found that the risk of back pain was moderately increased among employees with intensely demanding jobs, high levels of job dissatisfaction and stressful scheduling demands (*Am J Ind Med* 2003;43:179-187).

As providers of holistic health care, chiropractors are committed to helping patients adopt the **chiropractic lifestyle**, a way of life that focuses on preventing health problems, rather than merely masking symptoms with medication. This lifestyle includes stopping stress before it stops you!

The next time you feel stress starting to build, try one or more of the following tension tamers:

- Exercise
- Meditate or pray
- Listen to some favorite music
- Phone a friend
- Go to a movie
- Lose yourself in a good book

Traumatic Injury

While the largest percentage of mid-back pain falls into the “chronic” category — instigated by daily activities gone awry — traumatic injuries occur as well. And when they do, doctors of chiropractic restore patients to health with the same safe and gentle maneuvers they use for chronic conditions.

Unlike the spine of the neck (cervical spine), which has far less stability and is more prone to injury, vertebrae in the thorax region are considerably more stable.



Supported by their surrounding ligaments, these vertebrae are also protected by the rib cage. “The commonest cause of fractures of the thoracic lumbar spine is hyperflexion with rotation resulting from falls, direct trauma, or road traffic accidents.” (*Br Med J* 1993;307:1552.)

Herniated thoracic vertebrae are less common than cervical or lumbar ruptures. Pain, radiating outward from the mid-back region, is the most frequent complaint (*Am Fam Physician* 1992;45:2162).

If you are experiencing back pain, don’t minimize its significance. Make an appointment with your doctor of chiropractic for a complete examination to rule out any ruptured disks or vertebral subluxations.

Tackle Trouble

Sports can also result in subluxations

of thoracic vertebrae.

And, fracture is a real possibility in thoracic injuries as well. Scientists explain that because symptoms of trauma in this “relatively immobile area of the spine may be nonspecific, a thoracic spinal fracture may go undetected, possibly exposing the individual to further injury if athletic activities are resumed.” (*Am J Sports Med* 1993;21:57.)

Symptoms indicating the possibility of post-game thoracic injury include:

*Pain in the mid-back
(made worse by deep breathing)*

Stiffness

Inability to rotate upper body

If you or your child play any sports, schedule regular chiropractic check-ups. Early detection of spinal injuries is crucial.

Warning Sign

It’s also important to note that mid-back pain may indicate the presence of osteoarthritis (OA).

A chronic degenerative disorder, OA is characterized by cartilage loss: resulting in pain and stiffness. That’s why it’s important to let your doctor know if you are experiencing either of these symptoms.

In severe cases, OA of the thoracic spine results in “hunchback.” Regular chiropractic care may ward off this disfiguring condition before it takes hold.

Don’t wait for pain to be your “wake up” call. Make an appointment with your doctor today for a complete physical. Your mid-back and entire body will thank you!

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