

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Alleviate Auto Injuries With Chiropractic

Some injuries — like burns, bruises and cuts — are easy to spot. Others, however, may only be detected during an examination by a doctor of chiropractic.

Many of these “hidden injuries” stem from automobile accidents. And although elusive, these injuries are far from minor. Immediate diagnosis of auto-related injuries like whiplash, hairline fracture and misaligned spinal bones (vertebrae) is critical. That’s why Dr. Gravesen examines accident victims’ entire musculoskeletal system to detect hidden injuries.



Dr. Gravesen doesn’t limit this approach to just those involved in high-speed, high-impact accidents. Even low-impact collisions, where there are no skid marks and minor to no visible vehicle damage, can injure occupants. “Crash tests indicate that a change of vehicle velocity of 4 km/hr (2.5 mph) may produce occupant symptoms. Vehicle damage may not occur until 14-15 km/hr (8.7 mph).” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1998;21:629-39.)

Regardless of the speed or circumstances involved, early chiropractic intervention is vital. Left undiagnosed, veiled auto injuries can lead to a lifetime of pain and agony.

The following examples highlight some of the most common auto injuries and how Dr. Gravesen and chiropractic care can help.

Whiplash

Dr. Gravesen notes that patients who assume they are fine after an accident — and aren’t thoroughly examined — may not begin suffering the debilitating effects of whiplash for months or even *years* after the original trauma. Researchers have termed this phenomenon delayed onset whiplash associated disorder, or DOWAD.

Whiplash can spark misalignment and serious injury to the joints, vertebrae, discs, muscles, nerves and ligaments of the neck. Fortunately, chiropractic care can help.

When vertebrae become misaligned, it results in a condition known as **vertebral subluxation**. This is a common finding in whiplash injuries. Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxa-

tions with safe and gentle maneuvers known as **chiropractic adjustments**.

Back Injury

Motor vehicle accidents — specifically rear-end collisions, striking non-moving objects or getting broadsided by another vehicle — are a leading cause of back injury: particularly low-back pain (LBP).

The force of impact can instigate multiple vertebral subluxations. Fortunately, chiropractic adjustments restore proper spinal alignment and effectively relieve LBP.

In a study of 681 patients with LBP, researchers noted that those who received chiropractic and physical therapy were “much more likely to perceive improvement in their low-back symptoms” than patients who received only medical care (*Spine* 2006;31:611-21).

That was certainly the case for an 18-year-old man who sustained a fracture of the third lumbar vertebra during an automobile accident.



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In addition to regularly scheduled chiropractic care, the patient wore a brace. Four months later, the patient suffered only occasional, minor LBP (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1996;19:539-51).

As many as 43 randomized trials of spinal manipulation for LBP were published in peer-reviewed medical journals. Of that number, 30 trials showed that chiropractic care provided more improvement than the comparison treatments. “Other studies have shown that chiropractic care compared with medical care is safer, costs no more and often costs much less and has consistently greater patient satisfaction for treatment of similar conditions.

“Consequently, there is now better public and professional opinion of chiropractic with coverage by insurance companies and government agencies. That trend is likely to continue.” (*Clinical Orthopaedics & Related Research* 2006;444:243-9.)

Neck Injury

Automobile accidents may be particularly traumatic to the head and neck. That’s why the doctor takes great care to properly X-ray the spine of the neck (cervical spine).

In one case, a hospital emergency department missed a cervical spine fracture-dislocation in a 77-year-old man involved in a car accident. “The patient visited a chiropractic clinic six days later, where X-ray films were again obtained, finding that the patient sustained fractures of C5 and C6.” The patient also suffered dislocation of the same vertebrae (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2002;25:263-69).

Another study details the case of a 17-year-old girl who endured a motor-vehicle collision. In addition to pain in her neck and shoulder, the patient’s symptoms included vertigo (dizziness), tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and confusion. The patient sought chiropractic care.

“During ten weeks of care and 22 office visits all symptoms subsided.” In addition, all vertebrae instability was

completely resolved (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:279-87).

Headaches

Headaches often accompany neck injuries and are also associated with cervical vertebral subluxations, which may spark muscular dysfunction and nerve interference.

According to one scientific report, a 21-year-old woman with neck pain reported suffering from headaches following a motor vehicle collision. She also demonstrated moderate range-of-motion restrictions in her neck.

After a year of soft-tissue treatment that produced ineffective results, the woman began receiving chiropractic care. “The patient described greater and more immediate relief [with chiropractic] and longer pain-free periods than could be achieved by soft-tissue treatment alone.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2001;24:520-5.)

Chest and Rib Injury

The skeletal structure of the midback includes 12 pairs of ribs and 12 vertebrae. Each of the vertebrae is attached to a corresponding pair of ribs. In an auto accident, however, these bones can become misaligned, fractured or both.

One study reveals that seat-belted drivers in older cars without air bags have a higher incidence of chest and rib injury than those whose cars feature both safety devices. Out of 42,055 accidents, the steering column (39 percent) and steering wheel (36 percent) were the primary instigators of injury (*Ann Thorac Surg* 2006;82:444-50).

During a chiropractic adjustment, the doctor slowly moves misaligned vertebrae and ribs back into place. This process relaxes the connecting muscles: a vital step in reducing patients’ midback pain and improving mobility.

Everyone Is Different

It’s important to remember that no two accidents are exactly alike. And no two people will have exactly identical injuries. “The same collision may cause injury to some individuals and leave others unaffected,” say researchers (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:420-7).

Variables include the following:

- Posture of the occupants
- Ligament strength
- Body positions in the vehicle
- Amount of muscle activation
- Health of the nervous system

Because so many factors come into play, schedule an immediate chiropractic appointment after *any* auto accident — no matter how minor.

And remember: You have the right to choose your own health-care professionals. Don’t be pressured into interventions without first requesting a second opinion from a doctor of chiropractic.

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