

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Chiropractic Care & Arthritis

Millions struggle daily with arthritis pain, which can range from moderate to debilitating. Worse yet, the drugs used to combat this chronic condition spark a host of unwanted side effects, including ulcers and other gastrointestinal disorders.

Luckily, there are ways to prevent this disease, and to find drug-free relief when it does strike. Dr. Gravesen wants patients to know that preserving joint health is key to avoiding or managing arthritis, and that chiropractic care can help. How? By promoting optimal spinal alignment, which keeps joints in top form.



When spinal bones (vertebrae) are misaligned or restricted, the result is a common condition known as **vertebral subluxation**. Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxations with safe, gentle maneuvers known as **chiropractic adjustments**.

Keeping the spine in alignment has immediate and long-term benefits. Read on to learn why — as well as ways to identify arthritis symptoms and details on how chiropractic care helps prevent and ease this painful condition.

Osteoarthritis

Vertebral subluxations stress the body's joints, causing them to move out of alignment. In response, the joints form bone spurs — jagged bits of deposited calcium — that scrape

and irritate surrounding muscles, tendons and tissue. The result? Osteoarthritis.

Osteoarthritis (OA) commonly affects hips, knees, hands and backs. Symptoms include pain, stiffness, muscle weakness, swelling and joint deformity. Maintaining proper spinal alignment, however, encourages circulation — keeping joints well-nourished with a steady supply of blood — and reduces the likelihood of injury.

Prevention is critical because researchers note that prior joint injury significantly increases the risk for later-life OA at the injury site (*Ann Intern Med* 2000;133:321-28).

This conclusion was based on a study of the prior and current injury status of 1,321 graduates from the Johns Hop-

kins School of Medicine in Baltimore, Md., between 1948 and 1964. The follow-up period for this study was 36 years.

That's why Dr. Gravesen urges patients to avoid underestimating the severity of even a seemingly "minor" injury. This is particularly crucial for youngsters. "By 65 years of age, 13.9 percent of participants reporting a knee injury in youth or young adulthood had developed osteoarthritis in the knee, comparing with only 6 percent of those without any such injury," concluded the researchers (*Ann Intern Med* 2000;133:321-28).

In cases where OA is already present, chiropractic care provides safe and effective pain relief, as exemplified by a study of 252 patients with low-back pain secondary to OA.

Researchers randomly assigned patients moist hot packs plus chiropractic care or moist heat alone. The study, which included 20 therapeutic sessions over a period of several weeks, showed that those receiving hot packs plus chiropractic care "reported greater and more rapid pain reduction and greater and more rapid ROM [range of movement] improvement than the moist heat group." (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2006;29:107-14.)



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Rheumatoid Arthritis

Unlike OA, rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an inflammatory autoimmune disease that attacks the synovium of the joint. The synovium, a thin layer of connective tissue that lines the capsule of a joint, lubricates and facilitates its movement.

In one study on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), researchers surveyed 232 patients with RA. Results showed that approximately two-thirds of the respondents had used — and benefited from — CAM. But the best news? Chiropractic care was at the *top* of these patients' lists (*Ann Intern Med* 1999;131:409-16).

Other Forms of Arthritis

There are more than 100 forms of arthritis. While OA and RA are among the most prevalent, there are several non-musculoskeletal instigators of arthritis as well.

Infections

Infections, according to the Consumer Health Information Network (arthritis-symptom.com), can also spark arthritis. One example is the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is transmitted to humans by the common tick. To reduce the likelihood of contracting this painful disease, make sure everyone in your family wears long pants (with the cuffs tucked inside calf-length socks) when walking or playing in wooded areas. Ticks can fall from overhead trees as well, so hats and long sleeves are also a good idea.

Even landscaped garden areas accented with wood chips can harbor ticks. That's why health professionals suggest covering up even when gardening.

Scleroderma

How can a systemic skin disease like scleroderma — that causes hardening and thickening of the skin — be linked to arthritis? By similarly affecting

blood vessels, internal organs and joints.

Psoriatic Arthritis

Psoriatic arthritis leads to inflammation of bone and joint tissues. This condition affects 5 percent of all psoriasis sufferers and is likely to affect the fingers or spine. Symptoms are mild in most people but can be quite severe.



Fibromyalgia

Although it doesn't lead to the joint deformity traditionally associated with arthritis — nor cause the associated inflammation or damage to joints or muscles — this soft-tissue, rheumatic condition produces similar symptoms.

Chiropractic care can help, however. In a Canadian study, 21 fibromyalgia patients received four weeks of spinal manipulation and soft-tissue therapy. At the end of the study period, chiropractic management had improved patients' cervical and lumbar ranges of motion, straight leg raise and reported pain levels (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1997;20:389-99).

Managing Arthritis

In addition to chiropractic adjustments, your doctor of chiropractic may suggest other all-natural approaches to managing arthritis.

Lose Weight

Obesity contributes to type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary heart disease. It also increases the likelihood of developing arthritis by sparking wear and tear on the body's joints.

The next time you go to the grocery store, lift up (but don't buy!) two 5-pound bags of sugar. Now, imagine carrying them around with you everywhere you go. Definitely not a "sweet" thought! But it is proof that losing even a modest 10 pounds can substantially lighten the load on arthritic ankles and knees.

Exercise

Exercise helps to alleviate joint stress by strengthening the surrounding muscles. Strong thigh muscles, for example, can dramatically reduce the stress load placed on knees.

According to the American Chiropractic Association, "Exercise is critical in successful arthritis management. It helps maintain healthy and strong muscles, joint mobility, flexibility, endurance, and helps control weight."

Even "light" exercises, done while seated in a chair, can benefit those with arthritis. As with any exercise endeavor, however, talk with your doctor first.

A Pain-Free Future

Regular chiropractic care can help you achieve a pain-free future: particularly when it comes to arthritis. Ask your doctor today about scheduling a complete physical — with a particular emphasis on joint health.

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