

What can I expect when I see a chiropractor?

**General
Chiropractic
Council**



**Protecting patients
Setting standards**

Why might I go to a chiropractor?

The first thing that may spring to mind is that 'chiropractors treat backs'. But chiropractors do much more than this: they are concerned with the framework of bones and muscles that support the body (the musculoskeletal system).

So, even though they do treat backs – and very successfully – today's chiropractors also diagnose and treat other musculoskeletal problems as well as a number of other conditions.

Chiropractors mainly treat:

- **back, neck and shoulder problems**
- **joint, posture and muscle problems**
- **leg pain and sciatica**
- **sports injuries.**

There is some evidence, though more research is needed, that you may see an improvement in some types of:

- **asthma**
- **headaches, including migraine**
and
- **infant colic.**

What is chiropractic?

Chiropractic is a health profession concerned with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system, and the effects of these disorders on the functions of the nervous system and general health. There is an emphasis on manual treatments including spinal adjustment and other joint and soft tissue manipulation.

(World Federation of Chiropractic, 2001).

By helping the musculoskeletal system work properly, chiropractors can play a major part in relieving disorders, and the pain or discomfort that goes with them. These can be the result of accidents, stress, lack of exercise, poor posture, illness and the everyday wear and tear that happens to all of us.

Chiropractors take a 'holistic' approach to your health and wellbeing. This means that they consider your symptoms in the context of your full medical history, your lifestyle and your personal circumstances.

Chiropractors can provide a 'package' of care that is based on the best available evidence. Guidelines (see www.nice.org.uk/CG88) for the management of NHS patients in England and Wales with persistent low back pain were published in May 2009 by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). Broader European guidelines were published in 2004 (see www.backpaineurope.org).

As well as physical manipulation, the full package of care includes advice about exercise, lifestyle, and activity. Chiropractors will aim to:

- reassure you
- ease your distress by controlling your pain
- help you to prevent the pain happening so often
- get you back to your normal activities.

Don't avoid activity simply as a way of avoiding the pain – hurt does not always mean harm. Your chiropractor may be able to help you with appropriate treatment.

What happens when I visit a chiropractor for the first time?

Normally your first visit can last anything between 30 minutes and an hour. During this time, the chiropractor:

- will take a full case history
- may ask you to remove some of your clothes, and will provide privacy for you to do so. Tell your chiropractor if you feel uncomfortable about this. If you are asked to undress, you will be offered a gown
- will ask for your permission to give you a thorough physical examination (this will include neurological and orthopaedic tests, if necessary)
- may take or send you for x-rays if they are needed.

A chiropractor's first concern is to find out what is wrong. They will also check for signs of any serious conditions for which you would need to go to your GP or to hospital.

What do I need to know before my treatment starts?

Treatment is very much a partnership between you and your chiropractor.

Before your treatment starts, your chiropractor should explain to you clearly:

- what they found in the examination
- the treatment plan they propose
- the benefits and risks associated with your condition and proposed treatment.

The receptionist or the chiropractor will tell you how much you will have to pay.

Ask your chiropractor as many questions as you need to, to be sure that you understand what they have told you. Your chiropractor will then ask you to give your permission for treatment (they call this 'consent').

To help you feel more at ease during a consultation, you or your chiropractor may want another person to be there. This might be, for example, a clinic assistant or you could choose to bring a relative or friend. These arrangements should be made before your appointment, so please let your chiropractor know in good time.

If you would prefer to have only the chiropractor there, please let your chiropractor know. They will not do anything without your consent, and will respect your privacy and dignity at all times.

How many visits will I need?

This will depend on:

- your condition
- how severe it is
- how long you have had the condition
- how you respond to treatment
- how much of your chiropractor's advice you follow.

After your first examination and diagnosis, how long any further visits last will depend on your condition and the treatment you need.

The chiropractor will probably give you advice on self-help, diet and lifestyle. They will review your

progress regularly and you will be asked to give your consent to any changes to your treatment plan. Your chiropractor will discuss carrying out further investigations or referring you to your GP if your condition does not improve.

Some chiropractors offer rehabilitation exercise programmes. These have been shown to reduce disability as well as significantly reducing the chances of episodes of back and neck pain happening again.

Will the treatment hurt?

Chiropractic treatment is usually painless unless an area is inflamed (swollen). If this is the case your chiropractor will alter the treatment. Don't worry if you hear a clicking or popping noise when one of your joints is being adjusted – this is perfectly normal with some forms of treatment. It is also normal to have some reaction to the treatment. You may feel more uncomfortable for a short time, or stiff or tired for a day or so. On the other hand, you may feel more energetic. It is important that you talk to your chiropractor if you feel worried about anything either during or after treatment.

Do I need to tell my GP?

You do not need to let your GP know unless you want to. Many GPs recommend chiropractic care to their patients. With your permission, your chiropractor may send a report to your GP, with details of your condition and the treatment you are receiving. This is because your GP holds all your medical records, and it is in your interests for them to be complete and up to date.

Do I have to pay for my treatment?

You will need to pay for your treatment unless you are covered by Private Medical Insurance (PMI) or a health cash plan, or live in an area where there is NHS-funded chiropractic care.

Treatment through the NHS is not widely available at the moment, so it is a good idea to talk to your GP or chiropractor to find out the situation in your area. If you have PMI, confirm with your provider that chiropractic treatment is covered and tell the chiropractor that this is how you will be paying for treatment.

Can anyone call themselves a chiropractor?

No. It is illegal for anyone in the UK to use the title 'chiropractor' or to imply that they are a chiropractor unless they are registered with us (the General Chiropractic Council).

By law, we must:

- check people who apply for registration to make sure that they have a chiropractic qualification, are of good character and are physically and mentally fit
- set and monitor standards of education and training
- set standards of practice and conduct
- deal with any complaints about the conduct or practice of chiropractors.

For more free copies of this leaflet, please contact us at

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If you want to check that a chiropractor is registered, please phone us on **0845 601 1796**. (The call will be charged at local rates.) Or look on our website at www.gcc-uk.org, which lists chiropractors in alphabetical and geographical order.

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