

[IMAGE]

## Parts Of The Whole

By Dr. Kevin M. Wong

Consider the human brain for a moment. The brain is housed within your skull and makes up most of your head. Coming off the bottom of the brain is the spinal cord, which runs inside the spinal bones (vertebrae), and spans the length of your entire body. The bones of the spine actually serve as protection for your spinal cord. At each spinal (vertebral) level, a pair of nerves branches off of the cord and moves outward to supply other parts of your body.

Your brain is the control center for many of the body's functions. Your brain decides what types of actions will occur; then it sends information signals down your spinal cord and out at certain spinal levels. This method of transferring information is very efficient. It's similar to a subway train leaving the main station and making stops along its line. At each stop, the signal can either continue down the line or branch off to communicate with a certain part of your body.

We can take this idea one step further. We now understand that our brains send signals to different body parts, such as the arms, hands, legs and feet, through the spinal cord and nerves. These signals can send helpful information, including how to move your arms to swing a tennis racket, or how to move your legs so you can walk and run. These signals also can carry negative information, such as pain, numbness or tingling that occurs with certain injuries.

Female gymnast performing handstand. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Let's consider another example: a person who wakes up in the morning with a stiff and painful neck, along with some numbness in the right hand. You would think the simple cause of this problem is that the person slept wrong. A more thorough explanation comes from using the knowledge we have developed so far. The position the person was sleeping in caused some of the vertebrae in the neck to misalign and twist out of place, so the types of signals sent through the nerves are perceived as tight, painful muscles in the neck and numbness in the right hand.

The person in the previous example may find great relief having a chiropractor treat the affected parts of the spine. Chiropractors are specialists at analyzing not just the spine, but also other joints of the body, like the

elbows, wrists, ankles and knees. We use our hands to touch the bones and joints to figure out if they are in the correct position. Then we use our hands to provide gentle adjustments (movements), which help move the bones back into a better position. Once bones are back in alignment, muscles can start to relax naturally, pain signals decrease, and the body can function at 100 percent of its ability.

The idea of having your entire body checked for misaligned vertebrae is powerful because many of you come into chiropractic offices with aches and pains you thought were normal. Chiropractors are not only able to adjust the vertebrae, but also any place in the body where there is a joint between two bones. Chiropractic has helped countless patients with headaches and/or pain in the shoulders, ankles, knees or hips.

When a patient comes into a chiropractor's office, our philosophy of care focuses on how different parts of the body fit together as a whole. In other words, we don't just look at your knee if you come in with knee pain. We don't just look at your neck when you have neck pain. Believe it or not, all of your body parts and systems function in harmony with one another. Pain in one area does not necessarily mean that the problem is located in the same place.

It is our responsibility not only to analyze the area of pain you are telling us about, but also to uncover and educate you on why other body parts may be causing that pain. It's all about whole-body care. You can walk into my office complaining of lower back pain, and it would be common sense to think that if your lower back hurts, the cause of that pain would be in your lower back. Sounds good, doesn't it? Well, there can be more to this story than meets the eye.

Female gymnast. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Sometimes, the source of the pain is, in fact, coming directly from your lower back. Often, however, the cause of the pain, or a large contributing factor to it, comes from your lower extremities and feet. Most people do not realize their feet have three springy arches that help support the weight of their entire bodies. Whether it's due to genetics, heavy weight-bearing activities or bad shoes, to name a few, these arches can fall down over time. This makes your feet unable to support the weight of the body correctly, causing them to start rolling inward. We call this *overpronation*, and it's a fairly common condition, especially for runners. You may be surprised to know that 80 percent of people are overpronators.

Once your feet begin rolling in and the arches continue to fall, it places stress on your inner ankles, inner knees, hips, lower back, and different bones and joints, all the way up to your head. Pain can result in any or all of these areas. Your chiropractor can adjust your feet and other affected joints, and can recommend treatments that help support all three arches of the foot.

So, to wrap up this example, analyzing your feet is an important part of whole-body wellness. As chiropractors, we want to keep our patients feeling great, but the adjustments are just a part of the entire health package. Diet, exercise, healthy work and life habits, proper shoes, and suggestions on pillows and beds also come into play. We can use many other tools, combined with spinal adjustments, to tailor a specific chiropractic treatment plan to meet your needs.

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