[IMAGE]

The Well-Adjusted Spine

By Dr. Brian Jensen

How many visits does it take to have a well-adjusted spine? It depends on your definition of *well-adjusted*. For many patients who experience complete pain relief after their first adjustment, the answer might be one. But if you understand you can have a problem even without pain, you'll see that it takes a lifetime of minor tune-up visits to be at your best. These minor tune-ups also prevent many of the problems that can show up in your 40s and 50s.

It's important to look at the big picture to understand what is going to take place during your lifetime. This can help you see how chiropractic can work to preserve many of your body's functions and prevent degeneration of your spine. *Degeneration* is when your bones and the surrounding tissues deteriorate. This can lead to major problems for you later in life. Two basic principles form the underlying theme to lifetime care and a well-adjusted spine:

1. Balance is better than imbalance.
2. Mobility is better than immobility.

Notice that these two principles do not mention being pain-free, because simply being pain-free doesn't mean you are in perfect health. Pain is the weakest basis for evaluating long-term wellness. Obviously, pain is an important indicator of a problem and needs to be addressed, but dealing only with pain is not the main principle of chiropractic care. That's because right now, you may have a poorly functioning spine, full of degeneration, but not feel pain.

Let's examine some general ideas about what happens to the body during the first six decades of life.

Childhood and the Teen Years

Women stretching on the floor. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Arthritis is considered to be an older person's disease, but it can start as early as childhood. Here's how: In your first two decades of life, you will have indirect and direct stresses. Indirect stress is poor posture and direct stresses are sprains and strains from sports activities or other childhood traumas. These stresses, if left untreated, can lead to

degeneration and other problems - such as arthritis - down the road.

Poor posture is very subtle and rarely causes pain, yet it can lead to degeneration. It is important to have your feet, the foundation of your posture, evaluated. Flat feet can cause one leg to act shorter than the other one, which affects the pelvis and spine, as well as putting excessive stresses on your knees and hips. These stresses can lead to weaknesses that could make you more susceptible to injuries and/or degeneration (more about this later), and also can cause stress in your spine, which can create chronic misalignments. If you've ever said to your chiropractor, "My back is out," chances are, it all started with your feet!

Recent advances in technology have provided us with the ability to take a digital image of your feet. This will help us determine if custom-made, flexible orthotics (shoe inserts) would be beneficial for you. This is the starting point to the support that will pay off for you in the later decades of your life.

Your 20s and 30s

This period of time is when your chiropractor can start to see the early stages of degeneration and arthritis that actually had its beginning in your childhood and teens. You may begin to experience diminished flexibility and joint aches and pains. Athletic performance typically begins to decline. You might say, "I just can't (run, jump, swim, stand) like I used to." The early signs of joint degeneration begin to appear on X-ray. These are all signs of long-standing physical decline, yet you still don't have pain most of the time.

Symptoms flare up occasionally but are usually manageable with the types of care chiropractors provide. Again, pain is a late response to the process and is a poor indicator of health when you are trying to prevent degeneration and maintain overall wellness. A few visits to your chiropractor may provide temporary relief from your symptoms, but to get to the root of the issue and maintain overall wellness for a *lifetime*, a few visits won't be enough.

Your 40s and 50s

This is the time frame during which we start to see the effects of arthritis. Generally this is when your activities start to become limited because of reduced muscle flexibility and joint pain. Chronic pain is commonplace and destruction of cartilage in the knees and hips often results in joint replacement surgery.

At this point, your chiropractor can work to fend off the debilitating symptoms and help you maintain as much function as possible. Treatment can help you get your life back and slow down the effects of your

arthritis.

How to Prevent or Slow the Damage

A well-adjusted spine is possible to attain! Using a combination of proper diet, exercise, regular chiropractic adjustments and custom orthotics if necessary, you can have an active role in preventing damage (or slowing down the wear-and-tear process).

Diet

A young girl jumping into the air. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark This won't mark the first time you've heard how important it is to eat nutritional foods and maintain a proper diet. Yet, it plays a vital part of your overall health and one that is within your control and yours alone. Your chiropractor or nutritionist can suggest what you should be eating, but it's up to you to actually follow this plan and choose a healthy lifestyle. It may seem harder than it is - just start small with one healthy choice (veggies instead of fries for dinner tonight) and you're already moving in the right direction. Build on those moments and continue to make healthy eating choices and you can see a major improvement not only in your body, but in your overall health. The five keys known to contribute to longevity are:

1. Don't smoke.
2. Eat 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
3. Drink plenty of water.
4. Drink alcohol in moderation.
5. Get regular exercise.

Exercise

Getting exercise on a regular basis goes hand-in-hand with proper nutrition in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Here are some easy tips to get you started:

- Start slow, gradually increasing the intensity of your workout.
- Always warm-up and cool down when working out.
- Drink plenty of water (8 ounces before you work out, 8 ounces while you work out and another 8 ounces after).
- Listen to your body - stop exercising if you experience pain or dizziness.

- Wear proper-fitting, supportive athletic shoes

Chiropractic Adjustments

Being evaluated by your chiropractor even when you are pain-free can have a very valuable payoff in the later years. Healthy joints, muscle flexibility and a healthy nervous system will allow you to continue to exercise and be active, which we all know contributes to overall health.

Motion is life to a joint and to a person. A properly balanced body absorbs and disperses stresses, while an imbalanced body absorbs and *accumulates* those stresses. Those stresses begin in the feet and can affect your entire back and neck. Custom-made orthotics can be a great addition to your chiropractic care. That's because the effects of your chiropractic adjustments can last longer if your body is supported between visits. Orthotics work to support all three arches of your feet, which supports your foundation and your entire body.

The key to a well-adjusted spine is starting early and continuing to keep your body in balance. This is a lifetime's approach to overall wellness and health.

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