

[IMAGE]

## Growing the Right Way With Chiropractic

By Kevin M. Wong, DC

A healthy spine is essential for good overall health. Like adults, a child's neck and spine need to be in proper alignment to facilitate good posture, movement and functionality. Understand the fundamentals of child spinal development and you'll quickly understand why your child can benefit from chiropractic care.

As a chiropractor treating patients every day, I get asked a lot of questions. One of the most common questions posed to me is, "Why do children need to go to the chiropractor? They are so young. They don't need to be adjusted, do they?" The answer to this question is a resounding "Yes!" Let me take you on a journey of understanding so you can see why kids and chiropractic go hand in hand.

kids back to back - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark I remember when 6-year-old Tucker (name has been changed for privacy) came in to see me for the first time as a patient. I had been treating his mother for over five years, and I had met him when he accompanied her on occasion. Tucker had been playing with one of his friends when he fell and hurt his neck. His neck was stiff and in so much spasm, he could not turn his head to the right. He was scared and his mother was concerned about whether he needed to go to the pediatrician.

After assessing his neck, I determined that his neck muscles were so tight that they had misaligned his neck vertebrae. I explained what was happening to him and then used very gentle methods to realign his spine. He was relieved to feel much better after we worked with him. The next day, he was almost back to normal.

### Basics of Child Postural and Spinal Development

When babies are born, their bones are mostly cartilage, which is strong and flexible. Their muscles are underdeveloped, so they can't hold up their own head. Over the first few months of life, their muscles strengthen and they develop the ability to coordinate movement.

By three months of age, most babies can lift their head while lying on their stomach. At around six months of age, they can roll from their stomach onto their back, and by nine months they can sit unassisted. Babies then begin to crawl, and by their first birthday most are able to stand. As their spine and muscles develop -

along with their confidence - they begin to walk.

When a baby is born, the spine is "C shaped." This changes at around the age of three months, when the curve in the neck develops and the baby gains control of head movement. The bones, ligaments, discs and muscles around the spine gradually become stronger and more coordinated, protecting the spinal cord and nerves within.

The curve in the baby's lower back develops as the baby starts to crawl, and is further developed as the baby begins to stand and walk. The C-shaped spine eventually changes into an "S shape" that will form the adult spine. This S shape gives the spine its flexibility and allows a greater range of movement, helping children's bodies to cope with the slips, jolts and falls that are part of growing up.

In most cases, the spine develops as a straight, upward structure. At times, there can be a side-to-side curvature called *scoliosis*. Scoliosis can vary from mild to severe. The more severe a scoliosis, the more likely internal organs and other structures can be stressed or compromised.

When we are born, our feet have no arches. As we go through our stages of development and begin to stand and then walk, the arches begin to form. We have three arches of the feet that eventually develop; they are fully formed by the time we reach 6-7 years old. Once a child has reached 7 years old, the feet are done developing and will grow accordingly with the rest of the body.

### **Your Child's Spinal Health**

How do you know if your child is on track developmentally? To help determine your child's spinal health, perform this simple test. Look at your child and see how the spine looks when they are standing (facing away from you) with their shirt off. Does the spine appear straight or mostly straight? If you see a curve either to the right or the left, make a note of how it looks to you. Then, have the child bend forward and see if the curve disappears. This is helpful information to tell your chiropractor when you bring your child in to see them. Early detection of spinal health concerns will likely offer more effective treatment options.

Also, look at your child's feet. Do they seem to walk with one foot turning outward? Do they appear to have flat arches? As a parent, you can help identify any "interesting" ways your child might be walking, standing or running. How do you know what to look for? You can always compare them to their siblings and other children their age. Then talk to your chiropractor, who is trained to know what to look for and can help you make sense of your observations.

## **Why Chiropractic Care During Childhood Is Beneficial**

three children - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Remember that children have a spine, just like you and I do as adults. Kids go through their daily activities of playing, running, riding their bikes, playing sports, falling down and roughhousing with their friends. Their spines and the bones that make up their joints can move out of alignment, just like adults; sometimes even more so, since they are so active and often "throw caution to the wind" in terms of personal safety.

Just as you believe in getting regular tune-ups from your dentist, medical doctor and your optometrist, make sure your children benefit from that type of thinking as well. Most of the aches and pains that we go through as children (and as adults) can be greatly helped by getting adjustments from a doctor of chiropractic.

The youngest patients could see the biggest benefit from chiropractic care. Think of an infant who, during birth, has their head, shoulders or neck pushed against the mom's pelvic bones. Or perhaps the child had a difficult birth and was stuck in the birth canal at an odd angle. There is spinal stress associated with those scenarios, and the baby can be born with their spine out of alignment as a consequence.

Babies respond quickly to adjustments. Often common infant/toddler conditions like ear infections, colic and irritability can be improved with adjustments to their spine. Start them off right while they are young and they will keep those good habits into adulthood.

## **Straightening Up America**

"Straighten Up America" is a bold and innovative health promotion initiative designed to empower the American people toward better spinal health and an improved quality of life. This national program also serves as the prototype for an international health promotion initiative.

The vision driving Straighten Up America is very simple. It envisions a time when every American will take two or three minutes every day to care for their spinal health, just as they care for their dental health. The need for spinal health promotion is great, as evidenced by the billions of dollars that are spent each year related to disability from low back pain alone.

Before the creation of this initiative, there was no short, simple, engaging spinal exercise program specifically designed to promote the public's spinal health. But now, you can apply the Straighten Up America initiative to your life and that of your family by performing spinal health exercises and getting your

spine checked by your chiropractor on a regular basis.

Our children are truly amazing beings; as we watch them grow from infancy to adulthood, the wonders never cease. Their bodies are constantly changing, and it is often challenging to keep them functioning in a healthy, happy manner. Take the time to establish good health patterns, including spinal health, for your whole family. Talk to your chiropractor for more information.

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