[IMAGE]

Growing Up With Chiropractic

By Dr. Claudia Anrig

Children bump and jar their spines constantly in the first five years of life. After that, even normal, everyday activities can cause spinal trauma with lasting effects. Read these tips on caring for your child's developing spine, starting with their first chiropractic adjustment.

You'll probably never see your 5- or 6-year-old bend over to pick up a toy and freeze in pain, and then hear them say, "Oh, my back went out again." Vertebral subluxations and spinal degeneration that may cause that kind of pain generally will not appear in children - but they can definitely start in childhood.

Birth Trauma and Infant Spinal Stress

For many young parents, natural childbirth may mean that they had a drug-free, vaginal delivery. The question to ask is if the birth was stress-free to you and your baby. Long labor or the use of the suction cap (vacuum extractor), forceps or any forceful long-lever intervention (Caesarean section or extensive pulling on your newborn's neck) may have caused undue stress to their delicate spine. Add to this the improper lifting of the infant out of a car seat or during a diaper change, and the minor spinal traumas that affect the spine and nervous system, which may result in the presence of vertebral subluxation (when the spinal vertebrae lose normal motion or position).

Many parents report that when their infant was given a chiropractic adjustment, their quality of life improved, noting the reduction or complete resolution of common infant health issues such as colic, unexplained crying, poor appetite, reflux, earache, colds and allergic reactions.

Learning to Walk

A young boy standing in a flower pot and holding a toy watering can. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark When your child takes the first few venturous steps toward walking, they stand next to the table or couch, wobble back and forth a little bit, take one or two hesitant steps toward the middle of the room ... and then plop onto their bottom. In some instances, the child doesn't make it far enough away from the table or chair and hits their head on the furniture. These repeated jars to the spine will not in themselves cause a

major spinal injury, but as they accumulate, repetitive stress injuries will occur.

Exploring Their Surroundings

During the first few years of life, children will develop from helpless infants into fearless adventurers. Bumps and falls naturally come with your child's desire to learn everything about the world around them in the quickest amount of time possible, but these bumps and falls will cause strain and trauma to the spine. When spinal bones lose their normal position or ability to move during this stage of tremendous physical growth, possible permanent deformities (spinal asymmetry) can occur. Left uncorrected, these small cumulative traumas potentially can have far-reaching effects.

While a doctor of chiropractic doesn't treat or cure illnesses, many common childhood disorders may be the result of nervous-system interference or malfunction caused by spine-related problems, such as a weak immune system and digestive, hormonal, respiratory or learning disorders. This is just the tip of the iceberg, but appropriate chiropractic care can help locate and correct these problems and restore normal spinal and nervous-system function.

Children bump and jar their spine constantly in the first five years of life, and after that, even their normal everyday activities can cause vertebrae that protect the spine to lose normal motion or position (known as vertebral subluxations). Each of these spinal traumas causes lasting effects:

- Delicate nerve tissue can be damaged, resulting in interference with the brain's ability to send nerve impulses to organs, tissues and muscles.
- Discs, blood vessels and other soft tissues can swell and become inflamed.
- The body may respond with bone spurs and other abnormal bone growth.
- Various systems (immune, digestive, respiratory, etc.) throughout the body may malfunction.

In each of these examples, pain or other obvious symptoms may not be present at the time, yet optimum health and well-being have been compromised.

Your Child's Developing Spine

Four children laying in the grass. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark There are three windows of time in which your child's spine will go through major stages of development. The first is birth through age 5. This is definitely the most critical time, since it is during this period that the child also has the most minor

traumas and repetitive stress injuries to their spine.

The second window of development is from 5-10 years of age. During this time, your child will begin school and spend recess climbing on monkey bars, sliding down slides, playing organized sports, and generally leaving themselves open to repeated falls and tumbles, resulting in spinal injuries.

Finally, from age 10-15, your child's spine will go through its last stage of development. During this final stage, your child's spinal growth will be greatly affected by most, if not all, of the following:

- Improper backpack loading and carrying
- Poor posture
- An inactive or sedentary lifestyle
- Repetitive sports movements
- Typical sports injuries

It may be possible that you missed the first window of opportunity for care, but it's not too late. Even your 7-, 10- or 15-year-old son or daughter can benefit from chiropractic care.

The Benefits of Chiropractic Care

Even as the public is becoming more aware of the benefits of early detection and care of the vertebral subluxation complex, the odds are that you were looking for pain relief for yourself as an adult when you first went to see your family wellness chiropractor. During your initial examination, it's possible that a certain phase of degeneration was detected. If you were informed that you are at phase 1, the original damage to your spine was likely 10-20 years ago. If you were at phase 2, the original damage to your spine was probably about 20-40 years ago. For example, if you first saw your chiropractor when you were in your late 20s and you're in phase 1 of degeneration, then the damage to your spine originated when you were a preteen.

So, the most obvious answer to the question of why your child may need chiropractic care is: to avoid having your child suffer the same pain that first brought you into a chiropractor's office by starting care early. Spinal problems that go undetected or neglected in children become more serious problems as adults.

Your Child's First Adjustment

When your child is seen by your family wellness chiropractor, their spine and nervous system will be analyzed to determine if a vertebral subluxation is present. Often, the doctor will touch the spine and muscle (static or motion palpation), examine the length of the legs (pelvic misalignment may shorten one leg) or examine your child's posture (level of head, shoulder and hips).

If your child does indeed require an adjustment, your chiropractor will gently place his or her hands to the spine with a light touch. Often, only the fingertips of the doctor's hand are used to gently move the vertebrae, allowing the body to return to its normal position.

The essence of chiropractic is that it acknowledges that the body functions from the inside out. A simple way of understanding this concept is A.D.I.O., or Above (brain function), Down (spinal chord), Inside (nerve supply), Out (to every tissue of the body, including muscles, organs and glands). When the nervous system is functioning at its optimal level, then you and your children are experiencing a true expression of health.

Moving You and Your Family to a Wellness Lifestyle

You may already be aware of the benefits of chiropractic care. You may have experienced for yourself the relief that comes from having a properly aligned spine. If you have not had your child's spine evaluated, it's time to schedule an appointment to determine if there is a vertebral subluxation (which is painless until later in life).

Like dentistry, chiropractic, when started young, provides your child with a way to attain full-body health that lasts a lifetime.

Claudia Anrig, DC, practices in Fresno, Calif., and is on the board of directors of the International Chiropractic Pediatric Association, an organization that can answer your questions regarding the value of chiropractic care during and after pregnancy.

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