

The Wellness Express™

Jump on the train to good health

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Chronic Constipation: How Chiropractic Care Can Help

Presented by:

Introduction

Constipation is a major cause of discomfort for millions of people. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that over 4 million people in the United States experience frequent constipation, resulting in about 2.5 million doctor visits each year.¹ Chronic constipation - having three or fewer bowel movements per week - is also common. A 2007 study published in the journal *Alimentary Pharmacology & Therapeutics* reports that symptoms of chronic constipation are often severe and bothersome and that many patients are frustrated with conventional (i.e., medical) treatment options that are just not effective or long-lasting.²

Chiropractic care has long been used by chronic constipation sufferers to help promote regularity and reduce discomfort. Your chiropractor has numerous strategies he or she can use to treat your chronic constipation, including spinal adjustments and dietary advice. This edition of the Wellness Express looks at the issue of chronic constipation in closer detail and explains how chiropractic care is an effective and

conservative approach to this extremely common health problem.

What is Chronic Constipation & How is it Caused?

Constipation, including chronic or long-term constipation, is a symptom, not a disease. According to a 2009 study published in the *British Medical Journal*, chronic constipation is a common and debilitating condition involving consistent difficulty with defecation.³ Chronic constipation is most common in children, women (especially pregnant women) and adults over the age of 65. This health problem is also common after childbirth or surgery. Constipation occurs when your colon absorbs too much water or when its muscle contractions become sluggish. Both circumstances cause stool to pass through your colon more slowly than it should, causing your stool to become hard and dry and difficult to eliminate.

A poor diet - especially a diet lacking in fiber - is the most common cause of constipation. According to UCLA's

Exercise of the Week

Pelvic Rotations – Figure 4

Difficulty: Easy

(Consult your chiropractor before starting this or any other exercise.)

Start: Lie down on back with legs bent to 90 degrees and feet on floor. Place arms out to side, palms up.

Exercise: Take one leg, and cross ankle over opposite knee. Then, let legs roll all the way to side so that foot rests on floor. Hold for 30-60 seconds, and then return to starting position. Switch sides, and repeat 2X per side.



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Center for Neurobiology of Stress, other possible causes of chronic constipation include structural problems in the colon, certain medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, Parkinson's disease, etc.) and certain medications, including medications for blood pressure, pain and seizures.⁴ Travel, sedentary living and dehydration are additional factors that may cause constipation.

The Role of Chiropractic Adjustments in Treating Constipation

Chiropractic adjustments may play a significant role in relieving chronic constipation. A 2001 study published in the *Journal of the Canadian Chiropractic Association* states that weekly chiropractic adjustments may help eliminate chronic constipation in addition to treating low back pain and improving general well-being.⁵

Another study, published in 2007 in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*, reports that manual medicine techniques (including sacral area adjustments and abdominal massage) may cause a dramatic improvement in bowel function in some cases of chronic constipation.⁶

Because constipation occurs frequently in the very young, many studies examining the role of chiropractic adjustments on constipation have focused on this group. According to a 2008 study published in the journal *Clinical Chiropractic*, a trial of full-spine chiropractic care (involving high

velocity low amplitude thrusts and activator technique) in constipated children produced improved bowel movement frequency and decreased straining, pain and rectal bleeding.⁷

Chiropractic Dietary Approach

Your chiropractor understands the importance of a healthy diet in treating and preventing chronic constipation and can counsel you on beneficial dietary habits for this health purpose. Some general strategies your chiropractor may employ to help eliminate your chronic constipation include boosting your consumption of high-fiber foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables, beans, whole-grain breads), limiting your intake of low-fiber foods (e.g., ice cream, cheese, processed foods), drinking an appropriate volume of water and reducing your caffeine intake

Other Natural Approaches

Your chiropractor can share with you other natural approaches that may help with chronic constipation, including exercise, dietary supplements, warm baths, abdominal massage and other home remedies. Always speak with your chiropractor before using diet and other approaches to treat your chronic constipation. Chronic constipation may be a sign of a more serious underlying health problem that only your healthcare provider can diagnose.

Quote to Inspire

"It is tranquil people who accomplish much"

Henry David Thoreau

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