

Seniors and Chiropractic Care



Dr. Larry Lake is a licensed psychotherapist and is the CEO of BayView Healthcare. Lake says "as a local nonprofit healthcare provider, we are excited about how this FORUM can help share the knowledge and expertise of

the more than 275 healthcare professionals at BayView and across our continuum of care. In each issue we will address an area of interest to help consumers be even more informed about their health and wellness."

In this FORUM, Dr. Marty Monahan, D.C., N.M.D will introduce us to the outstanding benefits of senior chiropractic care. As we age so do our spines and Dr. Monahan will offer several non-invasive treatment plans. Dr. Marty Monahan graduated from Life Chiropractic College in 1990 as one of the youngest to graduate at that time. Dr. Marty opened a separate office in Palatka in 1998,

now serving a patient base of 10,000 patients in Putnam County. He is one of the few Certified in 2001 for Impairment ratings and disability determination for the Forensic Chiropractic Medical Examiner. In 2003 he earned his Doctorate in Naturopathic Medicine and an Idaho Naturopathic Physician state license. He is also Certified in Injectable Nutrient Therapies (2002), Certified in K-Laser USA Class IV Therapeutic Laser (2011). Dr. Marty was the team chiropractor for the Jacksonville Sharks Arena football team. He has lectured extensively on biomechanics of the spine, chiropractic, nutrition and many other natural therapies. Dr. Marty is also a nationally published author (Blueprint to Health)

disease, injuries from falls, car accidents or overuse from previous occupations, and increased muscle spasms or tone.

Why is increased range of motion something seniors want? No matter what activity you participate in, your range of motion matters. Do you want to bend over to pick up your grandchildren? You can do it better with increased range of motion. Do you want to kneel while gardening? Increased range of motion can make this easier. Do you want to swing your golf club with more strength? Increasing your range of motion will help. Whatever you do in life, increased range of motion will help you do it better.

Increased Balance and Coordination

Balance and coordination in seniors often come from injury or degenerative changes to the neck region. Mechanoreceptors are located in the back joints of the neck and are responsible for providing the brain with information needed for balance and coordination by telling the brain where the head is in relation to the body.

Aging causes minor deficiencies in the mechanoreceptors' function and results in loss of body awareness. Then instead of using mechanoreceptors, a person is left to use vision to determine where they are in space.

To compensate for the loss of awareness of the location of the legs in space, the feet are kept wider apart than normal, causing an unusual gait. As impairment to mechanoreceptors increase, compensation becomes harder and harder until finally, the senior is unable to get up from a chair or rise from a fall. Chiropractic stimulates the mechanoreceptors, leading to better balance and coordination.

Decreased Joint and Tissue Degeneration

When your spine has a subluxation, problems occur. Think of a subluxation like a misalignment of the tires on your car. Having your tires misaligned means that they will wear out faster and usually wear away more in some areas than others. The same is true with a misaligned spine. Having subluxations means that your spine will wear out faster.

Chiropractic Care Is important for Seniors

Seniors experience changes in their spine as they age. Some of these changes can be quite dramatic. That is why chiropractic care can be so important during this critical time of life.

What changes do seniors see? Spinal discs, joints, ligaments, muscles and other spinal tissues become weaker, less hydrated, more fibrotic and less able to withstand normal stresses. All of these issues can lead to arthritis. Arthritis is inflammation in one or more joints, which results in pain, swelling, stiffness and limited movement.

Additionally, seniors are more likely to have tissue injury and face an increase in healing time from these injuries. As seniors, these injuries often occur due to everyday events, such as bending or climbing stairs.

Chiropractors understand the process of aging as it relates to the spine and can provide an effective, safe and non-invasive treatment plan. Such a plan can include adjustments, mobilization, physical therapy, stretching and exercise. Some chiropractors will also assess nutritional intake and suggest

dietary changes and supplements. A good chiropractic plan will reduce pain, spinal stress and degeneration, and will increase flexibility and mobility.

Goals of Senior Chiropractic Care

Just as with other chiropractic care, a chiropractic plan for seniors will depend completely upon the individual. In addition to the severity of the condition, chiropractors will also look at the overall health of the patient. Patients who are in good overall health and still maintain an active lifestyle will find that their chiropractic treatment will be far more effective. Their plans will help them with pain relief and stabilization, allowing them to enjoy all the activities they enjoyed before their condition occurred.

Depending upon the overall health and activity of a patient, chiropractic goals can be one of the following:

1. Return to active lifestyle with no pain
2. Return to active lifestyle with some limitations and some limited pain
3. Return to some activities with some pain
4. Slow down the degenerative process

Although there is quite a difference between these goals, even goal four is a step up from a degenerative disease progressing at a normal rate.

Benefits of Senior Chiropractic Care

Many seniors are unaware of the outstanding benefits that are possible through regular chiropractic care.

Pain Relief

Chiropractic care is one of the most effective and safest forms of health care available to treat pain due to back, neck and head problems. Doctors of chiropractic are specifically trained to identify and treat subluxations and their effect on the brain and spinal cord.

Increased Range of Motion

Seniors often experience decreased range of motion due to many causes. As we age, muscles become shorter and lose their elasticity. Additionally, aging can affect the structure of bones and muscles, causing pain and decreased range of motion in the shoulders, spine and hips. Decreased range of motion come from such causes as arthritis, Parkinson's

Focusing on the mechanical principles of your body reduces spinal stress. This decreases spinal degeneration and other changes.

Increased Health and Well-Being

Once you are out of pain due to your chiropractic plan, what will you notice? You will notice that you feel great, sleep through the night, have more energy and simply can enjoy all the activities of the past.

In general, you will feel that your life is definitely worth living. Regular chiropractic care increases the quality of life and increases health and well-being. Chiropractic care for those over 65 is aimed at quality of life. The point is to not only eliminate pain and correct soft tissue abnormalities, but get you back to your active lifestyle again. Why should you have to stop jogging, dancing or golfing simply because you've become a senior? With chiropractic, you don't have to!

Decreased Incidence of Falling

A big problem in the elderly population is injuries due to falls. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), falls are responsible for 90% of the 850,000 bone fractures which occur annually among Americans over the age of 65.³ Chiropractors can reduce the risk of falls.

As mentioned earlier with balance, mechanoreceptors begin to malfunction as a person ages. Regular adjustments keep these receptors in proper working order, thus helping a senior maintain balance. Good balance will reduce falls. Additionally, chiropractors often prescribe stretching and exercise programs to increase strength, flexibility, mobility, balance and coordination.

Keeps Seniors Out of Nursing Homes

Dr. Coulter, the president of the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, published a study in 1996. The study evaluated the health status of 414 elderly individuals (average age of 80 years) and compared those individuals under chiropractic care with those not under chiropractic care. Some key points in the study were:

- At three years follow-up, less than 5% of those who used chiropractic care lived in a nursing home while 48% of those who did not use chiropractic care lived in a nursing home.

- At three years follow-up, only 26% of those who used chiropractic care were hospitalized compared with 48% of those in the non-chiropractic group.⁴

Remaining at home, rather than having to be cared for by others, is a valid goal of any medical procedure when dealing with seniors. Chiropractic is a great way to get this accomplished.

Decreases Arthritis

Arthritis literally means joint inflammation. Arthritis causes pain, loss of movement and sometimes swelling.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common type of arthritis in the senior population. It starts when tissue, called cartilage, begins to wear away causing your bones to rub against each other. OA most often happens in your hands, neck, lower back or the large weight-bearing joints of your body, such as knees and hips.

Over time, OA can make it hard to move your joints. It can cause a disability if your back, knees or hips are affected.

Determining the cause of arthritis can be difficult, because often several factors contribute to an individual developing this common problem. Some of the risk factors that can cause arthritis include:

- Genetics
- Age
- Weight
- Previous Injury
- Occupational Hazards
- Some High-Level Sports
- Illness or Infection

Although there is no one cause for arthritis, growing older often puts you at risk. This is because your joints and the cartilage around them become less able to recover from stress and damage.

Spinal discs need nutrition and proper waste elimination to heal properly. This happens through joint movement. Without enough movement, nutrients and waste do not move properly. A chiropractic plan for arthritis would involve restoring joint motion to keep the joints healthy and minimize degenerative joint changes.

Medicare Pays For Chiropractic

Medicare Part B pays for a chiropractor's manual manipulation of the spine to correct a subluxation. Additionally,

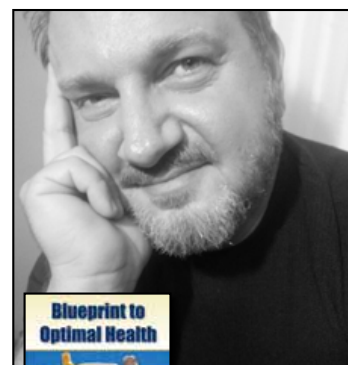
hand-held devices may be used by chiropractors in performing manipulation of the spine.

Your chiropractic treatment is covered by Medicare if:

- You have a significant health problem in the form of a neuromusculoskeletal condition that needs treatment (such as pain, inflammation, swelling, leg and foot numbness, etc.)
- You have a subluxation of the spine
- Manual manipulation has been recommended for improvement of your condition

You will have to pay the Part B deductible, and then 20% of the Medicare-approved amount. Medicare reimbursement will be limited to one visit per day, unless there is a medical need for more than one treatment each day.

The hands-on nature of the chiropractic treatment requires patients to visit the chiropractor a number of times. To be treated by a chiropractor, a patient needs to go into the office. A chiropractor may provide acute, chronic and/or preventive care, thus making a certain number of visits necessary. Your doctor of chiropractic should tell you the extent of treatment recommended and how long you can expect it to last.



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Each visit must be medically necessary and enhance your condition. Once further improvement cannot reasonably be expected from continuous ongoing care, the treatment is considered supportive/preventive, and Medicare will stop paying for treatment.⁶ *NY*

Sources:

¹. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html>. 2010.

². Ian Coulter. "Chiropractic Care for the Elderly." *Topics of Clinical Chiropractic*. 1996.

³. Medicare.com. <http://www.medicare.com/services-and-procedures/chiropractic-services.html>. 2008.



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