

# The Wellness Express



Jump on the train to good health

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## Depression and Chronic Pain - Can Chiropractic Help?

Presented by:

Although most people originally seek chiropractic care for back or neck pain<sup>1</sup>, many people are surprised by the positive effect chiropractic adjustments can also have on their state of mind. The secret to this phenomenon is how we process pain in our bodies and the incredible ways in which a chiropractic adjustment affects the nervous system.

### What Is Pain Anyway?

In simple terms, pain is a subjective experience. It's a sensation that tells you something harmful is either happening, or is about to happen, to you. What's interesting is the physical equipment used for the pain response is the same in all of us, but the same information that causes pain in one person can be completely different (even pain free) in another.

How can this be? All sensory information is recorded as a series of electrical bursts that travel along nerves, then through the spinal cord, and finally arrive in the brain where a meaningful response to this information is generated. However, the same information doesn't always lead to the same reaction in the brain. This is because bursts of electrical activity become modulated in the brain's emotional centers.

The final reaction to this information is directly dependent upon the current emotional state of the individual. When it comes to pain, it's nearly impossible to separate the mind and the body.

### Depression Increases the Pain Response

It's a well-known fact that many people who experience depression will also experience chronic pain. In a recent survey of over 5,800 random patients in a primary care clinic in the United States, those with major depressive disorder (MDD) were much more likely to report having chronic pain than in those without depression (66% versus 43% respectively). And those with MDD were four times more likely to be experiencing disabling chronic pain than those not affected by this mood disorder.<sup>2</sup>

In another report, researchers conducted a review of the literature relating low back pain and depression. They found conclusive evidence that the incidence of depression is much more likely to lead to chronic lower back pain.<sup>3</sup>

### Exercise of the Week

Exercise 1 – Range of Motion: Flexion/Extension

Difficulty: Easy

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

Start: Sit upright in chair.

Exercise: Bring chin down toward chest. Stop at point you feel resistance to movement, but no pain. Hold for 10-15 seconds. Then, move head back as far as it will go, bringing chin up toward ceiling. Stop when you feel resistance, but no pain. Try not to compress back of neck when you do this. Hold for 10-15 seconds. Repeat 5-10X.



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How big of a concern is this? According to the National Institute of Mental Health, mood disorders affect approximately 9.5 percent of the American population over the age of 18 in any given year.<sup>4</sup> And mental disorders are considered the leading cause of disability for those between the ages of 15-44 years old in Canada and the US, with MDD affecting the bulk of these individuals.<sup>5</sup>

The statistics on chronic pain conditions are even more staggering. One study which surveyed more than 42,000 individuals from 17 different countries found that close to 40% of individuals reported experiencing symptoms related to a chronic pain condition over the past 12 months.<sup>6</sup> Women and the elderly were the two groups that were the most likely to experience chronic pain. When they investigated the relationship of chronic pain to mental illness, these researchers found that there was a particularly high correlation to depression/anxiety disorders.

## How Does This Relate to Chiropractic?

Chiropractic, as a healing profession, is dedicated to the location and correction of spinal subluxations. Since nerve impulses must pass through the spinal cord on the way to the brain, it makes perfect sense that subluxations in the spine could significantly alter the quality of those signals.

When subluxations are present, this extra irritation to the nervous system could cause a signal that is interpreted as pain, when normally the same signal would not in the absence of subluxations. By correcting the subluxation, nervous system tone is normalized.

Although larger studies are yet to be conducted on this topic, recorded observations from patients and chiropractors alike support this theory. One case study documents a 46-year old man suffering from his third bout of clinical depression - who had significant improvements in his anxiety, fatigue and other symptoms after only his third chiropractic adjustment. He also saw a significant improvement in his self-assessed quality of life over the 11-month course of treatments.<sup>7</sup>

In another study, involving 15 subjects from three different chiropractic clinics, significant improvements were noted in depressed patients after receiving chiropractic adjustments to their neck. Results were documented using the Beck Depression Inventory (BD-II), and the average score for the group improved by nine points on the scale. On an individual basis, eleven participants experienced marked improvement, two had minimal improvement, and two others scored worse on the follow-up test.<sup>8</sup>



So, if you - or anyone you know - is experiencing depression, realize that chiropractic can be an additional tool to help improve both your physical and mental health.

## A Quote

"The oneness of mind and body holds the secret of illness and health."

- Arnold Hutschnecker

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