



# Pediatric Chiropractic Care

by Judi Burton

## A Personal Painful History

After going into false labor 31 years ago, my mother was told her insurance would not pay for a second doctor visit. Against her wishes, her labor was induced, which she believes caused the umbilical cord to wrap around my neck. After my mother was bullied into signing papers for a C-section, I was yanked by my chin directly out of my mother's womb instead of stretching through the birth canal during a natural birth.

As I grew, I was quite active, but often got very sick, including pneumo-

nia at 9, which initiated a lifetime of asthma. Walking to school carrying a 35-pound backpack on one shoulder, I began having serious pain in my back, hips, knees, ankles and neck. The pain lasted until I was 29 when I could finally afford health insurance and went to see a chiropractor for the first time. After Dr. Cohen, of Carolina Family Spine in Murrells Inlet, reviewed my X-rays, it was apparent that I had slight scoliosis, a bulging disc and sciatic nerve syndrome. Also, my atlas bone was in the wrong place. I had been in pain for so long that it began to feel normal. My posture was so lopsided that when he put me on two scales (one under each foot), it was evident that I was placing 30 pounds more weight on my left side. (I blame it on the backpack.) After nine months of treatment, I am now pain free and have absolutely zero asthma problems.

So, I guess you're wondering why my parents didn't take me to a chiropractor when I was a kid? There are two reasons: They didn't know what chiropractic care can do, and they just didn't know how bad my condition was. I was an overly dramatic child, and my "hamming it up" made my parents discount my complaints.

## Newborns

I spoke to four chiropractors, and three out of the four of them have children

of their own. Dr. Neil Fico, of Strand Spine Institute in Pawleys Island, has four kids ranging in age from 5 to 10 years. "I adjusted each of my kids 30 minutes after they were born," Fico said proudly. I asked him why. "Subluxation [significant structural displacement] and neurological complications happen during utero. There is often hip dysplasia [where the hip clicks in and out] and/or torticollis (where the neck and shoulders are strained)." The nervous system is the first thing that develops after the egg and the sperm meet. The spine is formed and the nervous system is incased in the spine. Think of your spine as a garden hose and your nerve supply as the water. If it is kinked, the water cannot flow out. It is much the same way with your nervous system. If your spine is not aligned, your nervous system cannot work properly. Now, think about a baby being born. He or she goes through vast amounts of pressure and stress while being brought into this world. Hands are pulling and twisting on his or her little head, and the canal walls are pushing on the infant as well. The baby is released into a very chilly world and is handled extremely quickly to unblock the air passages and get the baby breathing, and then is swaddled in a blanket. All of these things can cause stress on the newborn.

I spoke to Dr. John Fisher, of

Wholistic Alignment in Murrells Inlet, who has been doing chiropractic care for 34 years. He adjusted his two girls at their time of birth, and now they are grown women. "I studied gynecology and obstetrics in chiropractic school. I actually delivered my daughters at home. I had help from a midwife and it was done with the utmost care. The mother knows how stressful the birth is; I think it's 10 times worse for the child."

Dr. Matt Cullum, of Triune of Life Chiropractic in Murrells Inlet, who has a 4-and-a-half year old daughter, said: "In some cases, babies don't need to be adjusted at birth, but it's important to check. I personally don't X-ray newborns. Instead, I do something called an inversion where you hold the baby by the ankles upside down. You can see as the baby hangs if it is pulling to one side. That will give you evidence that something might be out of place. I put my pinky on the side of the neck where the atlas bone might be sitting incorrectly and gently push until I feel it sink into place." A very good example of an inversion can be found on YouTube under "Dr. Carol Phillips Inversion Technique."

## SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)

This excerpt is from a medical report written by Abraham Towben, MD, neuropathologist, Harvard Medical School, for the *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* publication: "Spinal cord and brain stem injuries occur often during the process of birth, but frequently escape diagnosis. Respiratory depression in the neonate is a cardinal signal of such injury. The occurrence of spinal cord or brain stem injury in 10 to 33 percent of neonatal deaths autopsied, reported in the past and reflected in the present study, indicates the significance of this form of birth trauma."

Fisher believes that many different things can cause SIDS, but also said, "A lot of the babies autopsied had interference in the upper cervical spine." Fico concurred: "When you lay a baby on its stomach face down, you are forcing the baby to breath

by moving its head to one side. The cervical nerves control the diaphragm and when the diaphragm is hindered, it can cause muscle spasms and the child could stop breathing." It is very important to make sure your baby is laid on his or her back. In fact, it is suggested that you should refrain from sleeping on your stomach as an adult as well. The strange position in which your head is on the pillow can cause muscle problems and misalignment of the spine. Stomach sleepers are often the bane of chiropractors, but also their best customers.

## Colic

The medical definition of colic is "a condition of a healthy baby in which it shows periods of intense, unexplained fussing/crying lasting more than three hours a day, more than three days a week for more than three weeks." An article from the *US National Library of Medicine* featured a study on baby colic with 73 chiropractors. "A prospective, uncontrolled study of 316 infants suffering from infantile colic and selected according to well-defined criteria shows a satisfactory result of spinal manipulative therapy in 94 percent of the cases. The median age of the infants was 5.7 weeks at the beginning of the treatment. The results were evaluated by analysis of a diary continuously kept by the mother and an assessment file comprised by interview. The study was carried out as a multicenter study lasting three months and involving 73 chiropractors in 50 clinics. The results occurred within two weeks and after an average of three treatments."

I asked Fisher what was the reason behind colic, and he stated that it was often just a hiatal hernia, which is a condition in which a portion of the stomach protrudes upward into the chest through an opening in the diaphragm. A spinal subluxation often causes the hiatal hernia, and babies who have had adjustments stop their colic symptoms almost immediately. Since 2003, it has been thought that acid reflux is the reason for colic. Because of this, there has been a 400 per-

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cent increase in anti-reflux medicines given to children. "Babies need acid in their stomachs; we all do," explained Fisher. "Hydrochloric acid is made in the stomach so that it can help digest protein and calcium, among others. If we take an antacid, it neutralizes the

natural acid. Sure it might stop them from crying, but their stomachs are still protruding up into their chests. What good does that do?"

## Allergies

A group of researchers from Kyoto University recently published findings on 13,000 children in Japan between ages 7 and 15. They found that 4 percent of firstborns suffered from food allergies, while 3.5 percent of second-borns and 2.6 percent of children born after those were allergic to certain foods. This helps the growing theory that our sanitary environment is inhibiting the development of children's immune systems. Children growing up in households with other kids are more likely to be exposed to more germs and allergens. Their immune systems have more opportunities to learn how to properly fight off infections, which lessens their chances for developing allergies. While this is a fantastic breakthrough in the ever-growing problem of higher allergy rates, there is still a serious concern parents are facing: Presently, 8 percent of children have food allergies in the United States, double the number in 2007!

Chiropractic care strives to boost the immune system so that it works at full capacity. The nervous system is directly connected to your brain. If the nervous system and brain are not working at best efficiency, the immune system doesn't develop properly to act on infections but not overreact to allergens.

Dr. Dan Falk, of Falk Family Chiropractic in Conway, is the president of the South Carolina Chiropractic Association. He sees many children in his office for allergies. "I had one girl come in with red, watery eyes and a stuffy nose that she had endured her whole life. After a few adjustments, she was fine. Her parents wanted to stop all of the medication she was taking because it was destroying all of the natural digestive flora in her gut." Falk also encourages women to breastfeed. "Mothers can give their babies the natural protection the baby needs in its early development that will boost the immune system." Falk does not charge for babies to be seen before they turn 1 month old. "It is such a crucial time in their lives to develop correctly."

## Risks

Pediatric chiropractic care has been under attack for a long time. In fact, many spinal manipulation practices are often called unnecessary. "There is no plausible explanation why high-velocity manipulation of the spine can help children with these medical conditions; it is an extraordinary claim," said professor Shaun Holt of the Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. "Given that this is a multibillion dollar industry, the lack of good research that has been undertaken is staggering. There is also evidence that many chiropractors advise against routine childhood immunizations, which is irresponsible." He claims that the monetary risk is the biggest risk of all because, according to him, chiropractic care does not work and is a waste of money. Sunita Vohra, MD, FRCPC, MSC, did 13 studies on adverse effects due to spinal manipulation. Her conclusion states:

"Serious adverse effects may be associated with pediatric spinal manipulation; neither causation nor incidence rates can be inferred from observational data. Conduct of an active surveillance study is required to properly assess the possibility of rare, yet serious, adverse events as a result of spinal manipulation on pediatric patients." *Natural Awakenings* called Vohra to see if she had done more trials, but she did not return calls. Falk agrees that there can be rare cases of problems with pediatric chiropractic care, but this only happens when a chiropractor who is not trained in pediatric studies tries to adjust a child. "Chiropractors have the lowest amount of malpractice insurance to pay than any other medical doctor. I only pay \$900 a year." An average malpractice premium for an internal medicine physician in the United States runs about \$6,000 a year. "I also attend just as many hours of school they do except I see more musculoskeletal and X-ray classes and they see more pharmacology and toxicology classes," Falk added. "The way I go about adjusting a child is a lot gentler than an adult, and the parent is always in the room," said Cullum.

## The End Results

While I grew up with agonizing pain, the children of chiropractors seem to have benefitted from their treatments. Fisher's two daughters who are near my age only missed one day each from school for medical reasons. "She broke her arm, so that had to be set, and my older daughter had strep throat one time. I kept her with me at work and adjusted her every hour on the hour and was fine the next day." Cullum's little girl has friends with ear infections and allergies, colds and other childhood illnesses, but she has never had any type of medical problem. "A lot of people criticize me because I don't immunize my kid, but she's a lot healthier than the kids that have been inoculated." Fico has also opted out of immunizations. "My kids don't get sick because they come to me and tell me when something isn't right. They are so in tune with how their body should feel that they catch the problem before it even starts." It is important to note that chiropractors raise their children differently than most, preferring a strict diet of only healthy foods and having reduced exposure to environmental toxins and chemicals.

I, on the other hand, have had no childhood chiropractic care; and I truly believe that if I had started getting adjustments as an infant, I would have skipped my painful experiences. My mother now knows what chiropractors can do and feels guilty for not taking me earlier. "I just feel so awful that I didn't listen to you when you were telling me you were in such pain," she said. The choice is up to each parent as to whether he or she wants to go only to a traditional pediatrician for childhood ailments or to also see a chiropractor with pediatric training.

*For more info on Dr. John Fisher, call 843-651-1086; for Dr. Matt Cullum, call 843-357-7200; for Dr. Neil Fico, call 843-979-2273; and for Dr. Dan Falk, call 843-248-0104.*