



Answer this
Quick!

Who is your
Chiropractor?

by Keith Waller

A terrible twinge grabs low in your back, stopping you dead in your tracks. Or maybe that dull backache grows to be more than you can bear, making it seem as if this day will never end, as you are constantly shadowed by an overpowering and unrelenting pain.

Nearly one in four people suffer from back pain, so you are certainly not alone. It's not just retired athletes, furniture movers or people who do hard physical labor at work that are suffering, either, it's more than 26% of the US population. The reasons are unclear as to why so many people are being affected by back pain, and though some suggest obesity, aging baby boomers or an increasingly sedentary lifestyle are to blame, if you're in pain, talk of blame is not what you want to hear.

Trying to Function While Drugged

The *New York Times* recently reported some shocking statistics, describing an explosion of people seeking prescribed drugs from their conventional medical doctors as an escape from back pain. Yet there is no relief in sight, in spite of a nearly tripled increase in overall prescription medication sales from 1997 to 2005, and a fivefold increase in prescription narcotic sales during the same period. Obviously, powerful drugs are not solving the problem.

The percentage of people seeking relief from back pain has risen dra-

matically, and more and more arrive at emergency rooms seeking any sort of relief. The costs associated with acute medical care, aside from lost wages, missed work and affected relationships, are tremendous – and perhaps completely unnecessary. The fact is, steps need to be taken early in order to stop back pain early before it advances.

“As we age, our bodies, and specifically our backs, change,” says Dr. Neil Fico, chiropractor and owner of the Strand Spine Institute in Pawleys Island. “All adults show some changes to the discs,” those cushiony cartilaginous connectors of the back bones that surround spinal nerves. “There just aren't any symptoms until we get older or the damage becomes more pronounced,” explains Dr. Fico.

Well-Care, not Sick-Care

Chiropractic care is not acute care, to be used when one is immobilized with terrible pain, nor is it about emergency care, surgery and powerful narcotics. Chiropractic care is about well-care, and taking care of yourself and your back in order to prevent or reduce pain early. It's about leading an active, healthy, pain-free life. So if you wait until things get unbearable, you may have a problem that is much more difficult—and much more costly—to solve. As a first-line therapy, chiropractic care offers a safer, more effective, drug-free and non-surgical approach. Everyone should have the name of their favorite chiropractor on the tip of their tongue.

A chiropractic well-care program is about balance. Not just balance in the alignment of your back, but balance in all things related to your health. Dr. Fico expresses his program as a five point system: a healthy nervous system, sound nutritional plan, rejuvenative sleep, a balance of mental and spiritual peace, and healthy movement with exercise.

Choosing Your Chiropractor

Each chiropractor has their own style and perspective, but confidence and communication are two of the most important factors in choosing one that is right for you. It is critical that you be able to discuss all of your well-ness needs and lifestyle issues with your chiropractor with comfort. Many

people choose a chiropractor based on referrals from friends, which is fine, but very limited. Dr. Fico suggests that, along with checking with friends, be proactive and do your research. Check certifications, licenses and programs, and ask whether they are equipped to do x-rays or spinal decompression treatments—one of the new and more successful healthy back programs. Some chiropractors offer physical rehab equipment and programs as well. “The initial consultation with me, and with most chiropractors, is free. This is when you can come in and talk to the doctor, discuss what your needs are, and see how comfortable you are with his or her style.” Dr. Fico explains that he sets aside appointment times for free consultations, reserving time afterward for exams. After doing your research, set up free appointments with the chiropractors you are interested in and meet with them to see if you “click”. “Many chiropractors have completely different techniques and styles, but overall the goal is to get you into that homeostatic state of balance and health,” says Dr. Fico.

“You can tell a lot from that first meeting,” Dr. Fico explains. “You can feel the energy in the office, and sense whether you'll be comfortable there.” This is also the time to talk about the chiropractor's techniques, tools and methods, as well as his health care philosophy. Is a busy office a good sign? “Yes and no” says Dr. Fico. “A successful chiropractor may be busy, but hopefully not so busy that you'll feel rushed.”

“Most insurance policies will cover chiropractic care for a problem – for acute care - but often doesn't cover the costs to keep you well or pain-free,” says Dr. Fico. If you have health insurance, you'll need to check the fine print to see what they will and will not cover. Budgeting to be pain-free and healthy is certainly money well spent, and at a much lower cost than hospitalization and medications.

To find a chiropractor near you, see the SC Licensee listing at <https://verify.llronline.com/LicLookup/>, select chiropractic, and enter the name of your city. For more information on the Strand Spine Institute and Dr. Fico, see StrandSpineInstitute.com and ad page 7.