

Neck Pain – Chiropractic and the Older Patient

People of all ages suffer from neck pain, and many frequently turn to chiropractors for care because it's been found to be one of the most effective and efficient forms of treatment available, and it carries minimal side effects! It has been projected that by 2030, nearly one in five residents in the United States will be 65 or older. Currently, approximately 14% of the patients treated by chiropractors are 65 or older, making it one of the most frequently utilized forms of complementary and alternative care used by older adults. What kind of care can a senior citizen expect when seeking treatment from a chiropractor? Let's take a look...

Musculoskeletal pain—pain in the neck, back, arms, and/or legs—drives the majority of elderly patients to chiropractors. While low back and neck pain are the most common complaints, it's not unusual for patients to also have one or two other conditions (or more) that they did NOT know chiropractic care could help. In fact, common “goals” for managing every patient (not just the elderly) include services related to patient assessment, maintenance of health, and prevention of illness, in addition to treatment of illness or injury. Common chiropractic treatment approaches include spinal manipulation and/or mobilization, nutritional counseling, physical activity/exercise, and (especially important for the elderly population) fall prevention.

We will now focus on neck pain as it relates to the elderly population and the various chiropractic management strategies that might be encountered by an elderly patient. Common reasons patients present regarding the neck include limited movement, stiffness, and pain. Neck pain can also interfere with sleep, as finding a comfortable position in bed can be quite challenging! Lifting, carrying, and playing with grandchildren is a very common issue for either causing a new complaint or irritating an existing one. Neck pain may also interfere with reaching and lifting. Thus, activities like yard or garden work may become more difficult and less enjoyable. Neck pain is often associated with headaches, which can make daily tasks even more challenging.

When an elderly patient visits a chiropractor for the first time or for a new complaint, he/she can expect to fill out some initial paperwork, as well as provide a history of the main complaint and any lesser complaints. This may also include providing a family and medical history. The examination usually includes general observations, palpating or feeling for muscle tightness, tenderness, warm/cool, range of spinal motion (neck, back, extremities), orthopedic tests, neurological tests, and possibly x-rays. Treatment of the neck may include massage or mobilization to loosen up the neck, manipulation to free up restricted joint motion, and even exercise training. The goal of treatment is to improve neck motion, activity tolerance, and quality of life (less pain, improved sleep, etc.). So, whether you are 10, 20, 50, 70, or 90 years old, give chiropractic a chance to help you manage your neck pain.