

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Samila Hifai

Is Chiropractic Safe?

Chiropractic, which focuses on preventive health and maintaining optimal wellness, is an extremely safe option for warding off a vast array of conditions. It becomes even safer when compared to more invasive alternatives, such as medication and surgery. Dr. Hifai wants the community to know the truth. Following are answers to safety-related questions frequently posed to Dr. Hifai.



Is chiropractic less safe than more traditional medical alternatives?

Dr. Hifai urges those who shy away from chiropractic because they are concerned about its safety to consider the safety of more traditional medical alternatives.

Medication and surgery have staggeringly dismal safety records. Even the seemingly benign class of over-the-counter medications called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) has disastrous side effects. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, thousands of people are hospitalized each year, and many deaths occur, due to adverse reactions to NSAIDs.

Not only are medication and surgery hazardous, but they may also be ineffective. Research indicates that, while painkilling medication may provide a quick fix initially, it often exacerbates conditions over the long term. For

instance, regular use of painkillers for headache actually provokes more headaches to occur (*Headache* 1996;36:14). Researchers also theorize that long-term use of painkillers may trigger chronic pain conditions, such as fibromyalgia.

Surgery's safety and efficacy records aren't much better. For instance, a significant percentage of back-surgery patients return home without relief. Worse yet, the pain may exhibit traces of neuropathy: a disease or abnormality of the nervous system (*BMJ* 2003;327:985).

It is estimated that the United States averages 25,000 to 50,000 cases of failed back surgery syndrome per year (*Orthop Clin North Am* 1985;16:417-

44). Other countries also have growing rates of the disorder.

Chiropractic, on the other hand, is rarely linked with any serious complications. Plus, research proves its effectiveness.

Isn't it bad for bones to be cracked?

Some patients are apprehensive about receiving their first chiropractic adjustment. Much of this fear comes from knowing that a "cracking" sound results from some adjustments. However, this sound (known as cavitation) is simply a drop in air pressure within a joint, which occurs when a "stuck" joint becomes "unstuck." Cavitation is **not** the sound of bones "cracking" or rubbing against each other.

Chiropractors are extensively trained to perform adjustments gently — and to custom tailor these maneuvers for each individual's unique body type. The vast majority of patients experience no discomfort whatsoever from adjustments. Rather, most patients report that they enjoy the procedure and find it relaxing.

Find Out More About Chiropractic Wellness Research From Dr. Samila Hifai

If you are interested in research documenting the benefits of chiropractic, you have come to the right place! Dr. Hifai is committed to providing patients with the latest cutting-edge research in chiropractic wellness and related fields, such as nutrition, stress-reduction, environmental influences on health, exercise and how one's attitude affects well-being.

To this end, each week we present a new, hot-off-the-presses *Optimal Health University*® topic. This office is focused on teaching our patients and community about this vital health information, which will jump-start them on the road to wellness. To find out more about this revolutionary approach to patient education, or to suggest future *Optimal Health University*® topics, please call our office today!

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I have heard that chiropractic adjustments to the neck may cause strokes. Is this true?

Some research indicates that people who suffer a stroke are somewhat more likely to have visited a doctor of chiropractic within the months leading up to their stroke, although the association is extremely rare. A smear campaign against chiropractic dramatically overstated the risk.

Moreover, what was not acknowledged by the propagators of the smear campaign was that individuals who endure a stroke are more likely to see **any** type of doctor prior to their stroke. And, in fact, a new analysis published in the prestigious medical journal *Spine* found “no evidence” of increased risk of stroke associated with chiropractic care, compared to primary medical care.

These findings demonstrate that chiropractic adjustments do **not** cause strokes. Rather, individuals who are in poor health (and therefore more likely to suffer from a stroke in the coming months) are more likely to seek the care of **any** type of doctor (not just doctors of chiropractic) for complaints related to their cardiovascular problems, such as headaches and neck pain.

The population-based, case-control and case-crossover study looked at associations between chiropractic visits and vertebrobasilar artery (VBA) stroke and at the association between primary care medical physician (PCP) visits and VBA strokes (*Spine* 2008;15:S176-83).

The study found that people younger than 45 years of age who suffered a stroke were about three times more likely to visit either a chiropractor or a PCP prior to their stroke. However, they were just as likely to visit either type of doctor. In those older than 45, there was no association with visiting a chiropractor and subsequent stroke. On the other hand, “positive associations were found between PCP visits and VBA stroke in all age groups.”

The researchers concluded that “the increased risks of VBA stroke associated with chiropractic and PCP visits is likely due to patients with headache and neck pain from VBA dissection seeking care before their stroke. We found no evidence of excess risk of VBA stroke associated with chiropractic care compared to primary care.” (*Spine* 2008;15:S176-83.)

I was told by a trusted health-care provider that chiropractic may pose safety concerns. Why would he or she say this if it isn't true?

Unfortunately, untruths are still being perpetuated about the safety of chiropractic.

Why are these myths being spread? One explanation is a lack of education — even among many in the health-care industry — about chiropractic, and the research proving it is safe. Unfortunately, many professionals lack any education about holistic health-care options, including chiropractic. In recent years, some medical schools and other educational arenas have taken strides to change this, but accurate information about chiropractic is still lacking from most curriculums. Consequently, many professionals form their opinions about chiropractic from unfounded rumors or hearsay, which are presented to them as truth.

Another possible explanation is that medication and surgery are big business. Like any business, sales may be affected if cheaper, more effective alternatives are promoted.

For instance, recent scandals reveal that regulatory agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration, may have given into lobbyist pressure from the pharmaceutical industry to approve drugs before adequate research was analyzed. Some of these drugs, such as Vioxx[®], were later pulled from the markets when they were found to cause grave complications, including death.

Another study suggests that back sur-

gery is big business, which may result in excessive procedures. According to the report, “the rate of back surgery in the United States was at least 40 percent higher than in any other country and was more than five times those in England and Scotland. Back surgery rates increased almost linearly with the per capita supply of orthopedic and neurosurgeons in the country. Countries with high back surgery rates also had high rates of other discretionary procedures such as tonsillectomy and hysterectomy.” (*Spine* 1994;19:1201-6.)

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