



HEART DISEASE AND CHIROPRACTIC

The popularity of chiropractic care has grown dramatically since the middle of the 20th century. Although most people seek chiropractic treatment to relieve musculoskeletal pain, certain types of pain may be indicative of the patient experiencing a heart attack just before or during treatment.

Chiropractors should expect to have at least one presentation of a myocardial infarction, or heart attack, during their careers, according to chiropractor Dr. Dwain M. Daniel. Research indicates that regular chiropractic adjustments may prevent heart attacks, lower blood pressure, reduce heart rate, relieve chest pain and support the cardiovascular system, according to the Palmer Chiropractic College.

Studies at the College investigated the effects of chiropractic treatment on the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems in reference to an analysis of heart rate variability. Findings indicated that chiropractic adjustments do reduce pain and lower participant's mean heart rate.

Additionally, anecdotal evidence indicates that adjustments of the atlas, or first cervical vertebra, may stop some heart attacks while they are occurring, according to chiropractor, Dr. Christopher Clarke of the Vibrance Family Chiropractic Center in Nashville. If a patient experiences a heart attack during an adjustment, gentle manipulation of the atlas may be appropriate and may alter the outcome; however, other emergency measures must be performed in an attempt to save a patient's life, including transport to the nearest medical facility. There are few studies on this fascinating aspect of chiropractic and additional research is necessary.

Reducing blood pressure

Chiropractic treatment also has a significant effect on blood pressure and anxiety levels, according to a study reported in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*. The study examined systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels and patients' anxiety levels before and after an adjustment. In all cases, those subjects who received active treatment experienced a distinct drop in blood pressure and a decrease of their anxiety levels. Results of this study provide evidence that chiropractic treatment offers support to the cardiovascular system.

Recognizing signs and symptoms

Women are just as likely to have heart attacks as are men; however, women are less likely to seek medical treatment or attend rehabilitation during or after a heart attack, according to the *Journal of Canadian Chiropractic Association*. Because women are more than twice as likely to seek chiropractic care, according to Clarke, it's important to recognize the specific symptoms they may exhibit. Men tend to experience extreme pain and heaviness in the chest and left arm during a heart attack. Although women may also experience these effects, they may exhibit very different symptoms, making a heart attack more difficult to diagnose. Women often complain of neck and upper back pain, which is mild and annoying and often mistaken as a structural problem. They are more likely to be misdiagnosed because of the vagaries of their symptoms.

Other symptoms reported by women during a heart attack can range from chest pain brought on during exercise or other strenuous activity that then feels better during rest. There may be crushing chest pain accompanied by other wandering pains to the rest of the body, vague wandering pains extending down one or both arms, and difficulty breathing with shortness of breath, fatigue or weakness. They may also be fearful, anxious and in denial.

Chiropractic treatment can increase vitality, boost immunity, relieve a variety of musculoskeletal ailments and strengthen the heart and cardiovascular system for both men and women. Patients should always check credentials for any chiropractic doctor before undergoing treatment, especially if they have a history of heart disease or other related disorders. Look for an experienced doctor who performs a thorough exam before attempting any adjustments.

BY JB Bardot

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