

**What can I
expect when I see
a chiropractor?**

**General
Chiropractic
Council**



**Protecting patients
Setting standards
Promoting the profession**

Why might I go to a chiropractor?

Even though the first thing that may spring to mind is that 'chiropractors treat backs' – which they certainly do very successfully – today's chiropractors also diagnose and treat other musculoskeletal disorders as well as a number of other conditions.

Chiropractors mainly treat

- **back, neck and shoulder problems**
- **joint, posture and muscle problems**
- **leg pain and sciatica**
- **sports injuries**

You may also see an improvement in some types of

- **asthma**
- **headaches, including migraine; and**
- **infant colic**

What is chiropractic?

Chiropractic is a health profession concerned with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system, and the effects of these disorders on the functions of the nervous system and general health. There is an emphasis on manual treatments including spinal adjustment and other joint and soft-tissue manipulation. (World Federation of Chiropractic, 2001)

By restoring normal function to the musculoskeletal system chiropractors can play a major part in relieving disorders, and any accompanying pain or discomfort, arising from accidents, stress, lack of exercise, poor posture, illness and the everyday wear and tear that happens to all of us.

Chiropractors take a holistic approach to your health and wellbeing. This means that they consider your symptoms in the context of your full medical history, your lifestyle and your personal circumstances.

Chiropractors can provide a package of care that is evidence-based and widely recommended (see www.backpaineurope.org).

As well as physical manipulation, the full evidence-based 'package' of care includes advice about exercise, lifestyle, and activity. Chiropractors will aim to

- reassure you
- alleviate your distress by controlling your pain
- help you to prevent it happening so often
- restore you to normal activity

Don't avoid activity simply as a way of avoiding the pain – hurt does not always mean harm. Your chiropractor may be able to help you with appropriate treatment.

What happens when I visit a chiropractor for the first time?

Normally your first visit can last anything between 30 minutes and an hour. During this time, the chiropractor

- will take a full case history
- may ask you to remove some of your clothes, providing privacy for you to do so. Tell your chiropractor if you feel uncomfortable about this.

If you are asked to undress, you will be offered a gown

- will ask for your permission to give you a thorough physical examination (this will include neurological and orthopaedic tests, if necessary)
- may take or send you for x-rays if necessary

A chiropractor's first concern is to find out what is wrong and also to check for signs of any serious conditions for which you need to be referred to your GP or hospital.

What do I need to know before my treatment starts?

Treatment is very much a partnership between you and your chiropractor.

Before your treatment starts, your chiropractor should explain to you clearly

- what they found in the examination
- the proposed treatment plan
- the benefits and risks associated with your condition and proposed treatment

The receptionist or the chiropractor will tell you how much you will have to pay.

Ask your chiropractor as many questions as you need, to be sure that you understand what you have been told. Your chiropractor will then ask you to give your permission for treatment (they call this consent).

To help you feel more at ease during a consultation you or your chiropractor may want another person to be present. This might be, for example, a clinic assistant or you could choose to bring a relative or friend. These arrangements should be made in advance of your appointment so please let your chiropractor know in good time.

If you would prefer not to have anyone other than the chiropractor present, please don't hesitate to let your chiropractor know. Nothing will be done without your consent.

How many visits will I need?

This will depend on

- your particular condition
- how severe it is
- how long you have had the condition
- your response to treatment
- how much of your chiropractor's advice you follow

Following your first examination and diagnosis the length of time of any further visits will depend on your condition and the treatment you need. If you are asked to remove some of your clothing you will be offered a gown. The chiropractor will respect your privacy and dignity at all times.

The chiropractor will probably give you advice on self-help, diet and lifestyle. Your progress will be reviewed regularly and you will be asked to give your consent to any changes to your treatment plan. Your chiropractor will discuss carrying out further investigations or referring you to your GP if your condition does not improve.

Some chiropractors offer rehabilitation exercise programmes. These have been shown to reduce disability as well as significantly reducing the chances of recurrent episodes of back and neck pain.

Will the treatment hurt?

Chiropractic treatment is usually painless unless an area is inflamed, in which case treatment will be modified. Don't worry if you hear a clicking or popping noise when one of your joints is being adjusted – this is perfectly normal with some forms of treatment. It is also normal to experience some reaction to treatment. You may temporarily feel more uncomfortable, stiff or tired for a day or so. On the other hand, you may feel more energetic. It is important that you talk to your chiropractor if you feel worried about anything either during or after treatment.

Do I need to contact my GP?

You do not need to let your GP know unless you want to. Many GPs recommend chiropractic care to their patients. With your permission, your chiropractor may send a report to your GP, with details of your condition and the treatment you are receiving. This is because your GP holds all your medical records so it is in your interests for them to be kept up to date.

Do I have to pay for my treatment?

You will need to pay for your treatment unless you are covered by Private Medical Insurance (PMI), a health cash plan or live in an area where NHS funded care is available. Treatment through the NHS is not widely available at the moment, so it is advisable to talk to your GP or chiropractor to clarify the situation in your area. In the case of PMI, confirm with your provider that chiropractic treatment is covered and inform the chiropractor that this is how you will be paying for treatment.

Can anyone call themselves a chiropractor?

No. It is illegal for anyone in the UK to use the title 'chiropractor' or to imply that they are a chiropractor unless they are registered with us (the General Chiropractic Council).

By law, we must

- check those who apply for registration to make sure that they have a chiropractic qualification, are of good character and are physically and mentally fit
- set and monitor standards of education and training
- set standards of practice and conduct
- deal with any complaints about the conduct or practice of chiropractors.

For more free copies of this leaflet, please contact us at

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If you want to check that a chiropractor is registered, please phone us on **0845 601 1796**. (The call will be charged at local rates). Or look on our web-site at www.gcc-uk.org, which lists chiropractors in alphabetical and geographical order.



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