

Using CHIROPRACTIC CARE and MASSAGE THERAPY to care for the ultimate machine

by Blythe Thimsen

ANY WELL-USED MACHINE, NO MATTER HOW GREAT THE brand, starts to show signs of wear and tear after years of use. From car repair bills, to the new snow-blower purchased last year to replace the one that finally blew its last pile of snow last winter, we are reminded on a daily basis that machines wear out after time. That includes the most finely crafted, beautifully engineered machine there is: the human body. We all show the wear and tear of time and work, and as a result we sometimes need to send ourselves into the shop for a little tune-up and repair in order to get ourselves back to working condition.

One of the most common effects of the battle life wages on us on a daily basis is to have discomfort in our muscles. It is almost like the human body has a bull's eye painted on the neck and back, indicating, "this is the place for pain to land!" Whether it is an injury from a work-related accident, or a gardening mishap, when you are in pain, finding a cure is your number one priority.

While the two options for injury treatment used to be a trip to either the emergency room or the family doctor, nowadays, many patients are expanding their list of go-to treatment options by including chiropractic care and massage therapy in the line-up. The typical person seeks chiropractic care or massage therapy for mechanical, neck, back or extremity pain. These are alternatives to seeing their doctor to discuss medical approaches to dealing with the pain. For those who view these fields as uncharted territory, there is much to be learned about the options they provide for helping you care for your most important machine.

According to the Mayo Clinic, as stated on their website, "Chiropractic treatment is based on the concept that restricted movement in the spine may lead to pain and reduced function. Spinal adjustment (manipulation) is one form of therapy chiropractors use to treat restricted spinal mobility. The goal is to restore spinal movement and, as a result, improve function and decrease back pain.

During an adjustment, chiropractors use their hands to apply a controlled, sudden force to a joint — pushing it beyond its normal range of motion. The joint's movement may be accompanied by a popping or cracking sound.

Chiropractors may also use massage and stretching to relax muscles that are shortened or in spasm. Many use additional treatments as well, such as ultrasound, electrical muscle stimulation and exercises."

Research suggests people who have had chiropractic care or massage therapy in the past, and believe it is a helpful method, will have more success with these forms of treatment. In other words: you have to believe in the treatment option you select.

The goal of chiropractic care is to move joints from a restricted position to a free motion, and to align joints. A joint has a normal range of motion, and if functioning properly, there should be no disruption in the communication between nerves and joints. The goal of chiropractic treatments is to free the joint so it has normal motion and to create well being through motion.

When deciding if you need to seek chiropractic care, there are many things to take into consideration. One thing to consider is your pain level and "func-

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tion deficit.” That means you not only need to look at how great the pain is, but also consider if you are able to operate at a high level of function, or if there are things you are no longer able to do without risk of further injuring yourself. If the pain level escalates to a point where it is intolerable, and your ability to do work is impeded, it is appropriate to seek care.

There are two delivery systems for chiropractic and massage therapy treatments. One is maintenance. This is where a patient enjoys the treatments they receive, feels relaxed and improved with treatment, and based on the belief that the treatments are helping to keep them from experiencing pain or loss of function, they choose to seek ongoing treatment for maintenance purposes.

The second delivery method is when care is sought after an injury, and the treatment is delivered for a short time period, specifically to “fix what is wrong” or to repair the injury.

Manipulation of the spine is most beneficial in the first 60 to 90 days following an injury. After the initial treatment, the demand for a course of treatments for flare-ups of the injury may be supported. An example is someone who hurts his or her back while gardening. After seeking chiropractic care or massage therapy for several sessions, and seeing a marked improvement, they may not need to continue regular treatments; however, if several months later they feel a flare-up after a strenuous activity, a course of follow-up treatments may be considered prudent at that time.

Align the spine. The term “aligning the spine” is well known, but does not truly convey what a chiropractor does. Most people seek treatment to care for joints or areas of the body which are injured and are not able to be mobilized – for example, you might have injured your neck and are not able to move it in a full range, due to swelling. When the spine is “aligned” what is truly happening is that the area is being manipulated so that the injured area is able to gain mobilization, and swelling is reduced. Whether the spine is literally straight, or “aligned” afterward may or may not be the case; achieving mobility, and eliminating pain and swelling is the

real goal.

An example is Lydia,* a woman who has a spine that naturally looks as though it is not aligned. After years of wear and tear, and suffering a few injuries, her body created a “new normal” which includes a spine that does not look as though it is aligned. She knows that her mobility is excellent, despite the fact that visually, her spine does not look aligned. The point is, “aligning the spine” does not necessarily mean a visually straight spine is the end result; mobility is the key. Each person’s body is unique, and a chiropractor’s job is to find the right treatment plan to help each patient achieve mobility and eliminate the pain.

A growing trend over the last 20 years has seen medical doctors and chiropractors beginning to work more closely, using areas of specialty from both fields in order to create a treatment plan that is best for the patient, allowing them to see and feel a marked improvement in mobility.

Improvement when it comes to back pain is always welcomed, because pain or injury in the back can have profound impact on your daily work and play. Unfortunately, it isn’t an isolated group of people who suffer from back pain. According to The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) “31 million Americans experience low-back pain at any given time.” That is a large portion of society needing to seek relief.

A few interesting facts about back pain:

- One-half of all working Americans admit to having back pain symptoms each year.
- Back pain is one of the most common reasons for missed work. In fact, back pain is the second most common reason for visits to the doctor’s office, outnumbered only by upper-respiratory infections.
- Most cases of back pain are mechanical or non-organic—meaning they are not caused by serious conditions, such as inflammatory arthritis, infection, fracture or cancer.
- Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year on back pain—and that’s just for the more easily identified costs.
- Experts estimate that as many as 80%

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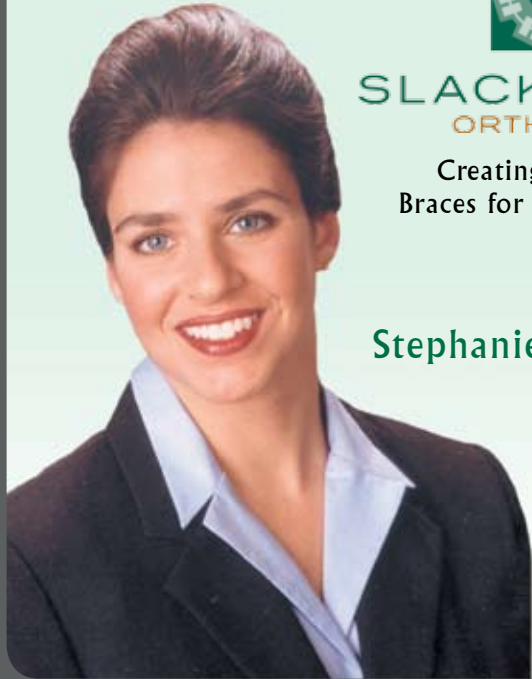
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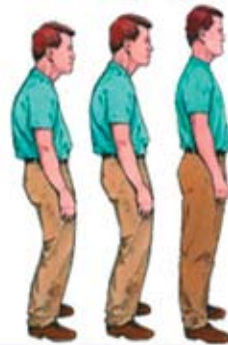
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of the population will experience a back problem at some time in our lives.

The opposite of having a painful back and tight muscles is to be relaxed and pain-free with comfortable loose muscles. If you have ever pampered yourself with a massage while spending a day at the spa, you are familiar with that feeling. While a massage might feel like the ultimate luxury, it can also serve as a great way to treat back, neck and muscle pain.

Skeptical that massage is anything more than a form of pampering? If so, consider this. Massagetherapy.com, an online resource for learning more about massage, provides the following list, showcasing the **benefits of massage**:

- Alleviate low-back pain and improve range of motion.
- Assist with shorter, easier labor for expectant mothers and shorten maternity hospital stays.
- Ease medication dependence.

Enhance immunity by stimulating lymph flow—the body's natural defense system.

- Exercise and stretch weak, tight, or atrophied muscles.
- Help athletes of any level prepare for, and recover from, strenuous workouts.
- Improve the condition of the body's largest organ—the skin.
- Increase joint flexibility.
- Lessen depression and anxiety.
- Promote tissue regeneration, reducing scar tissue and stretch marks.
- Pump oxygen and nutrients into tissues and vital organs, improving circulation.
- Reduce post-surgery adhesions and swelling.
- Reduce spasms and cramping.
- Relax and soften injured, tired, and overused muscles.
- Release endorphins—amino acids that work as the body's natural pain-killer.
- Relieve migraine pain.

There are many different types of massage that can help repair your body, and keep it from experiencing injury. Finding the right type for you could be a truly

relaxing and delightful experiment. Here are some of the basic forms of massage therapy. (Courtesy of aboutalternative-medicine.com)

Reflexology: Using thumb and finger pressure on the reflex points of the feet (which correspond to all areas of the body) to assist in achieving balance within the body.

Relaxation Massage: A smooth, flowing style that promotes general relaxation, improves circulation and range of movement, and relieves muscular tension.

Remedial Massage: A paramedical treatment that helps to restore function to injured “soft tissues” (muscles, tendons and ligaments). Therapy may involve the use of various types of massage, as well as a range of other physical treatments to assist your recovery. In addition, you may be asked to perform some activities at home to assist the process of recovery.

Sports Massage: Combines different massage techniques to enhance sports performance and recuperation. An effective component of any training program.

Deep Tissue Massage: Deep tissue massage is a type of massage therapy that focuses on realigning deeper layers of muscles and connective tissue. It is especially helpful for chronically tense and contracted areas such as stiff necks, low back tightness, and sore shoulders. Some of the same strokes are used as classic massage therapy, but the movement is slower and the pressure is deeper and concentrated on areas of tension and pain.

Whether you visit a chiropractor or a massage therapist, the most important thing to keep in mind is that your body is a fine piece of machinery, which must be maintained and repaired in order to keep working at its optimum level. By utilizing a variety of resources, which may include chiropractic care and massage therapy, you are making an investment in yourself, ensuring you will keep running like a well-oiled machine, for years to come. ■

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