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SPINE & SPORTS: Chiropractic Care for Children

Doctors of chiropractic have provided care to infants and children for generations. Many children suffer with pain, and all are vulnerable to stresses and strains from their activities, constrained postures, and sports. Sometimes children surprise their parents by reporting previously undisclosed conditions such as daily headaches or chronic pain during a medical history. Research shows that DCs can provide very safe and effective care for children of all ages and ease conditions that would otherwise fester into their adult years.

Pediatric chiropractic care may be foreign to most people, but there are good reasons why an infant, young child or teenager should be examined and treated by a chiropractor. The main reason is that they have a painful condition. Just like adults, children have spines, muscles, tendons and fascial connective tissues that can become stressed, strained, stuck, irritated and dysfunctional. Ibuprofen will not fix these.

Even without clear evidence of altered spine function or bodily strain, manual procedures that chiropractors use can diminish colic, a condition we don't completely understand; and it can change the course of chronic otitis media, a common nonbacterial clogging of the middle ear. School-age children are subject to strains to their undeveloped spines from the long hours sitting in classroom chairs or the daily lugging of heavy back packs. And of course many older children play sports and are subject to injuries. Chiropractic care is clearly indicated in all of these cases.

There are reasons why children or adults should not go to a chiropractor including the treatment of internal illnesses, infections, autism, to affect immunity or to have their spines xrayed to find misalignments: these are all invalid! Buyer beware! Furthermore, x rays should only be used to determine if there is a fracture or dislocation. DCs should work with a radiologist to best determine the most appropriate imaging in a pediatric case, such as an MRI to rule out a stress fracture.

The chiropractic package of care includes obtaining a thorough history, performing a physical exam, arriving at a diagnosis, then providing appropriate treatment. DCs should perform some of the same procedures practiced in a pediatric or orthopedic office such as evaluating joint ranges of motion, testing reflexes, looking at the inner ear and assessing muscles and connective tissues for tenderness.

A sports chiropractor might check a young athlete's ability to do a squat or lunge, or search for joint weakness that could render the child vulnerable to injury. When indicated, DCs will order an MRI or send out for a blood test. Once a child is deemed appropriate for treatment, joint manipulation and soft tissue therapy are often utilized which are the unparalleled skills of the doctor of chiropractic. Adjunctive procedures may also include nutrition advice, sport taping, therapeutic ultrasound or laser treatments.

As with adults, treatment of children is aimed at easing pain, improving body function, accelerating healing, and fostering a sense of wellbeing so that daily life activities, from running and playing to sleeping soundly are all sustained. Just as we adults want to feel well and more at ease, our children do too! The combination of thorough musculoskeletal physical examination and hands-on treatment makes the doctor of chiropractic an appropriate, and often optimal provider for children of all ages.

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