

Subluxation

What is Subluxation?

If you are a chiropractic patient, you may have heard the word subluxation mentioned. The subluxation is an important element of chiropractic theory and practice. But what does it mean? Actually, the definition of the word has evolved as it has received attention and investigation by the chiropractic profession, and it differs from the medical definition of the term. A consensus by the federally accredited chiropractic colleges leads to the following definition:

“A subluxation is a complex of functional and/or structural and/or pathological articular changes that compromise neural integrity and may influence organ system function and general health.”¹

What the above means is that a subluxation is a joint problem (whether a problem with the way the joint is functioning, a physical problem with the joint, a disease of the joint, or a combination of any of these) that affects the functioning of nerves and can therefore affect the body's organs and general health.

Your spine is a column of bones (vertebrae), cushioned by spinal discs, that are moved and supported by muscles, tendons, ligaments, and cartilage. Built into these bones are openings top to bottom and through each side. Through these openings pass most of the body's nerves from the brain. These nerves pass out from the spine on each side to all of the body's tissues and organs. The subluxation theory identifies that a problem in the joints of the spine is able to affect the nerves that exit at the point in the spine, thereby affecting the tissue or organ to which the nerve goes.

Chiropractors believe that if joints function properly, nerves will function properly, and the body will be better able to keep itself healthy.

How is subluxation detected?

A subluxation is usually suspected and located through palpation by the Doctor of Chiropractic. This process involves very skilled, hands-on evaluation of the spinal

and other joints. During this examination, the chiropractor is looking for any abnormalities in the joints (either too much or too little movement), unusual movement patterns, movement that causes pain, and other clues that indicate joint problem. Unless there is an observable change in the spinal alignment, abnormal movement that may be associated with a subluxation may not be detected by diagnostic imaging (X-rays, MRIs, etc.). If you have been in an accident, or have sustained some other traumatic injury, diagnostic imaging may be needed.

What is the treatment of a subluxation?

Chiropractic treatment of a subluxation involves an adjustment, sometimes called manipulation. There are many techniques for adjusting, all of which are precise and designed with a specific purpose. Adjustments are usually performed manually.

Doctors of Chiropractic are the most thoroughly educated in the skills of adjusting² and they perform 94% of all manipulation in the U.S.³ Adjustments should never be performed by an unqualified person. In some instances, adjustments are **NOT** the recommended method of treatment, and only a thorough examination by a professional who is skilled in palpation, adjusting, and physical diagnosis should lead to that conclusion. If your Doctor of Chiropractic finds that another type of health care would better suit your condition, the appropriate referral and consultation will be made.

If you have questions, regarding subluxations or any aspect of your chiropractic care, ask your Doctor of Chiropractic.

References:

1. Association of Chiropractic Colleges Resolution.
2. Hillyer M. “Manipulation in the Curricula of Chiropractic, Osteopathic, Physical Therapy, and Medical Schools,” Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research, Arlington, Virginia, 1995.
3. Shekelle PG, Adams AH, et al. “The Appropriateness of Spinal Manipulation for Low-Back Pain: Project Overview and Literature Review,” RAND, Santa Monica, California, 1992.