

Stretching

By Martha Collins, D.C.



A woman came in on Friday the 13th in agony--her spine was so subluxated that she could hardly get on the table for her adjustment. "I have been doing my stretches, I've been good--I don't know what happened," she said. In the interest of helping you stay away from this same fate the next Friday the 13th, we decided to devote this article to stretching and its relationship to your adjustments.

A common misconception that many people have is that stretches correct subluxations and can replace adjustments. Stretching allows your muscles to relax, allowing better range of motion, decreased tension, and a feeling of well-being.

This woman's last adjustment was February 2000, and although she was diligent at doing her stretching homework, she had forgotten how important adjustments are for her nervous system to overcome the stresses she is under as she goes through the course of her life. Adjustments are designed to correct the underlying subluxations acquired through exposure to physical, chemical, emotional and spiritual stress. Adjustments remove interference from the nervous system so that we can be more connected in our body, mind and spirit.

Stretches can reduce the tension in the muscles of our bodies, but they cannot overcome the influence of subluxations once they are present. Stretches can help adjustments "hold" better, sometimes longer, particularly if you are in an occupation where you spend time doing repetitive movement patterns. This woman's career necessitates spending most of her day in front of a computer--and over a seven or eight-hour period consider how much stretching is required to overcome and reverse that negative postural influence. It simply can't be done.

When a subluxation is present for many years, as you know, it leads to underlying degenerative changes in the joints, discs and holding tissues of the spine--osteoarthritis. Think of degenerative spurs on an x-ray like stalactites and stalagmites in a cave--they take many years to form. For spurs to form in the spine and be seen on a radiograph, it can take anywhere from 20-40 years (phase 2). This is why when we review your x-rays we want you to understand how long the underlying problem was there--the subluxation--that was the seed for the progressive degeneration--before the damage is even perceived. The joints of the spine receive their nutrition through movement of the synovial fluid that bathes the cartilage of the joints with nutrition. If a spinal joint is locked, (or subluxated) not only does the nervous system shut down, but that joint cannot receive its proper nutrition. The end result is a public that believes a degenerative spine is due to the natural aging process over which we have no control.

Let's say there is a door in your grandmother's house that isn't used much--our grandmother had one that went into the attic. If the hinges of the door aren't used often, the lubricative effect of the oil in the hinge decreases. It begins to dry out, break down and the hinge becomes sticky and squeaky due to disuse. The joints of our body work much the same way--the old adage if you don't use it you'll lose it is certainly true in this regard. Regular adjustments help the joints stay healthy, arrest further degenerative change and in many cases, reverse it by allowing the synovial fluid of the joints to bring nutrition to the cartilage.

You see, in our culture, we were never taught how to take good care of our spine and our nervous systems. We learned how to look after our teeth, our cars, the stain on our decks, but not the lifeline to every cell in our bodies! Daily stretching, or yoga (even better because through breathing, it mandates present-time consciousness) helps the spine stay supple between adjustments, gives us an opportunity to relax and meditate and helps us feel better. Stretching is like flossing your teeth--the more we adhere to good dental hygiene between visits, the better report we get from our dentist and hygienist at our check-ups. With stretching between visits, the better your adjustments will be and the healthier you will be!

And in the end, that's why I became a Chiropractor--to help you be well.

Let's face it--here's the bitter reality. No one ever told you to take care of your spine from birth to death. Correcting and better yet preventing the degenerative changes as a result of a lack of Chiropractic hygiene may not always win the popular vote in our culture (YET!). However, innately, it makes sense.

Dr. Martha Collins is a Family Chiropractor practicing in Kingston, Ontario with her husband Dr. Carl Weber. She is committed to spreading the message of Chiropractic around the world so we can all lead healthier, happier lives.