

Have you ever heard someone say to you, “being healthy is not only how you are *feeling*, but how you are *functioning* on the inside”? Well, this is certainly important if you are going to live a healthy lifestyle. Many conditions are hidden and do not produce pain for a long time. Just because we are symptom-free, that does not mean that we are 100% healthy. That is why it is so important to maintain a healthy spine and practice preventative measures to achieve optimum health.

Many people with neck and back pain have been told they have arthritis, disc degeneration, spinal canal stenosis, or some sort of muscle or joint dysfunction. The remedies for these conditions are numerous but treating your body as naturally as possible will ultimately lead to the best overall results. Most of these conditions can be resolved with regular chiropractic adjustments, diet and exercise, and weight loss. Let us look at each of these more closely.

Arthritis

Everyone achieves some level of arthritis as they age, whether it is the wearing down of the joints or buildup of calcium deposits. Though most arthritic changes cannot be reversed, it is important to keep things from getting any worse. Eliminating calcium deposits and maintaining mobility of the spine are two very important steps.

Spinal Canal Stenosis

Arthritis can affect the spine, as well as the other joints of the body. When the spinal column is stressed over a period of time, calcium deposits can build up and cause the spinal canal to narrow. This narrowing is called stenosis and can put pressure on the spine and nerve roots causing back and leg pain. Treatment is based on the individual’s circumstance, and often adjustments and exercise are all that a patient needs to decrease symptoms.

Disc Degeneration

Discs are the fluid-filled sacs that separate the bones of the spine. They act as our “shock absorbers” as we move around throughout the day. With a vertebra in an abnormal position, water is decreased in the disc and can cause dehydration in that area. The disc will shrink and weaken and begin to “degenerate.” Without the normal disc space, the bones of the spine are affected and will begin to break down. Removing this pressure and maintaining proper spinal alignment will decrease the chance for disc problems and re-strengthen the spine.

Muscle and Joint Dysfunction

As we age, we have a loss of muscle strength, and our joints begin to wear down. Maintaining a healthy body weight and exercising regularly can prevent most of the problems in the muscles and joints created by the aging process. When the muscles and ligaments surrounding the spine weaken, stability is decreased and makes the spine more prone to injury. Also, the hamstring muscles play a large part in our spinal health as well. When they are too tight, they pull on the pelvis often creating an imbalance, which pulls on the spine and leads to back pain. Stretching daily can eliminate any potential problems with the hamstrings.

Prevention and maintenance are crucial to avoiding chronic problems as we get older. One episode of pain, however small, tends to lead to another episode, which is usually worse and more difficult than the initial problem. Even if you are not experiencing symptoms, getting your spine checked for any of the above-mentioned

conditions should be a priority. Listen to your body, maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, and get regular chiropractic adjustments!