

The Long-Term Benefits of Chiropractic Care

By Charles Masarsky, DC

Many patients come in for their initial visit with a clear short-term goal: pain relief. Unfortunately, if that remains their only goal, they miss out on some of the benefits of chiropractic care beyond pain relief. The following patient education article is designed to assist you in discussing long-term goals of chiropractic care. Please feel free to use it on your bulletin board, as a front-desk handout or for lay lectures.

No one thinks it's odd when their dentist recommends regular visits to maintain good oral health for as long as possible, nor do they find it peculiar when their optometrist suggests regular visits to maintain good visual health for as long as possible. And yet many people are puzzled when their doctor of chiropractic recommends regular visits to maintain good spinal health for as long as possible.

Of course, when you are suffering with low back pain, neck pain or tension headache, it is completely understandable that you have one overriding goal - stop the pain. However, once this short-term goal has been accomplished, it is time to consider your long-term spinal health goals. In formulating your long-term goals, it is essential to understand that spinal health is about more than getting rid of pain. Spinal health has a long-term impact on every function affected by the spinal nerves, which influence every organ system in your body.

Breathing is a good example of a function most people do not associate with spinal health. A [case published in the 1980s](#) involved a 53-year-old man with a 20-year history of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.¹ More than 14 months after starting chiropractic care, the amount of air he was able to forcibly exhale in one complete breath ([a measure called "forced vital capacity"](#)) and the amount of air he could move in the first second of that complete breath (called "forced expiratory volume in one second") had both improved substantially (1 liter and 0.3 liters, respectively). This case is part of a growing body of literature indicating that improved spinal health through chiropractic care is often accompanied by improved lung volumes.²

The long-term implications of the link between chiropractic care and [lung volumes](#) cannot be overemphasized. In most adults, even those without pulmonary disease, lung volumes *do not* improve over time. In fact, lung volumes generally decline with age. Lower than normal lung volumes are associated with shorter lifespans.³ More specifically, depressed lung volumes have recently been linked to increased risk of stroke, heart attack, and other potentially life-shortening cardiovascular problems.⁴⁻⁶ Conversely, the better your lung volumes, the longer your lifespan is expected to be. Additional biological functions that seem to benefit from improved spinal health include reaction time,⁷ balance [and vision](#).⁸

In the short run, it would be great to get out of pain. Chiropractic care can help most people achieve this short-term goal of spinal health. In the long run, it would be great to retain as much lung capacity, visual acuity, reaction time, balance, and cardiovascular health as possible. Emerging research strongly suggests spinal health has a role to play in these long-term goals as well. Consider this when your doctor of chiropractic recommends regular follow-up visits.