

The Wellness Express™



Jump on the train to good health

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Chiropractic for Mid-Back Pain

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When people think of chiropractors, most think of treatments for lower back pain. Low back pain (LBP) is definitely the most common complaint treated by chiropractors, as it affects up to 31 million North Americans at any one time, and up to 80% of the population will experience debilitating low back pain at some point in their lives.¹

Did you know that **mid-back pain** is also quite common, and the causes of mid-back symptoms could even *exacerbate* lower back pain? We define the mid-back as the area of the spine between the shoulder blades, extending down as far as, and including, the upper lumbar spine.

What causes mid-back pain?

Of all potential causes, disc herniations are probably the least likely reason for mid-back pain. Not only are they rarely found in that area on MRI images, but even when present, they are often asymptomatic.² One of the reasons is because the mid-back does not have to support as much weight as the lower back does. Plus, the mid-back has a ribcage attached to it (decreasing its mobility). Without *excessive* movement in this area, disc bulges are less likely to occur.

Instead, symptoms in this area are more likely to be caused by muscle, nerve or joint irritation. With a number of postural muscles being anchored in the mid-back, any postural deviations (like head held forward or shoulders rounded) can result in stress and strain of these soft tissues. Since postural muscles run vertically, any tension in these muscles will cause compression of the joints in the thoracic spine. If you find yourself with mid-back symptoms related to postural changes, visit your chiropractor - chiropractic adjustments can help take pressure off the joints, plus facilitate proper postural alignment. Once the stress and strain is off your joints, degenerative changes from chronic postural stress can be prevented.



Exercise of the Week

Spinal Flexion

Difficulty: Easy

(Consult your chiropractor before doing this or any other exercise.)

Start: Place a mat on floor. Position your body as shown in Image #1, with spine in a neutral position.

Exercise: Try to move your spine into a fully flexed position. Concentrate on bringing belly button inward, pressing lower back up toward ceiling. Let head lower toward floor. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Return to neutral position and rest for 15 seconds. Repeat 5-10X.



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Ribs are another potential source of pain. Every vertebra of the thoracic spine makes a connection with up to four ribs (the first and last vertebrae of the spinal column only attach to two each). Fractured ribs can occur when a person experiences direct trauma to this area – it is an extremely painful condition, and could lead to complications such as a punctured lung. If you suspect your rib is fractured, go to the hospital immediately.

In between each of the ribs, there are *intercostal* muscles, blood vessels and nerves. Vertebral subluxations in the mid-back can irritate any of these tissues, resulting in pain that can travel along a rib from back to front. The pain can be sharp and sudden, or more achy and constant. If you are experiencing symptoms such as these, be sure to have your chiropractor assess your mid-back for vertebral subluxations.



However, if your mid-back pain is associated with a blister-like skin rash traveling in the same direction as a rib, it may not be a subluxation that's causing your problem, but could be a virus. Shingles is a condition where the chicken-pox virus (*Herpes Zoster*) infects one of the intercostal nerves, thereby producing extremely painful and burning sensations in the area of that nerve. Since the skin becomes very sensitive, this condition is difficult to treat manually. You should tell your chiropractor if you notice a skin rash associated with your mid-back pain.

How can mid-back problems cause lower back pain?

One of the main reasons this can occur is because the mid-back is an area where many large, powerful low back muscles attach. One of these is called the *iliopsoas*. It starts at the top of the leg, and then passes through the pelvis to attach as high up as the lowest thoracic vertebra. If vertebral subluxations are present in the lower thoracic or upper lumbar spine, this can irritate the *iliopsoas* muscle, causing it to be abnormally tight. Tightness in this muscle can cause a torqueing of the pelvic bones and compression of the sacroiliac (SI) joints leading to lower back and pelvic pain that requires chiropractic treatments too! The main postural muscles of the lower back (*erector spinae*) attach into the mid-back vertebrae and ribs as well.

Finally, consider this: the mid-back area is also where the diaphragm connects (the largest, most important breathing muscle). So, if you have mid-back issues, getting chiropractic care could be as important to your health as the very air you breathe!

Quote to Inspire

"The great art of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even in pain."

- Lord Byron

References and sources:

1. American Chiropractic Association. Back Pain Facts & Statistics. Source: <http://www.acatoday.org/level2/css.cfm?T1ID=13&T2ID=68>
2. Wait SD, Fox Jr DJ, Kenny KJ, Dickman CA. Thoracoscopic resection of symptomatic herniated thoracic discs:

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