

Chiropractic Effective for Neck Pain in Seniors, Study Finds

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A recent study shows that not only are neck adjustments safe for the elderly, they're extremely effective for neck pain when combined with exercise. Although [earlier studies](#) have shown the benefits of chiropractic for neck pain, there have been no randomized clinical trials on the treatment specifically for the elderly.

The [study](#), published in *The Spine Journal*, included 241 patients over the age of 65 years who suffered from persistent neck pain. Patients were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups: spinal manipulation therapy delivered by a chiropractor, plus home exercise (SMT+HE); supervised exercise plus home exercise (SRE+HE); or home exercise alone (HE).

After 12 weeks of treatment, over 60% of chiropractic patients had at least a 75% improvement in pain, compared to approximately 25% of patients in the SRE+HE group, and nearly 20% of the HE only group. These significant differences were less pronounced at the one year follow-up however.

Still, the researchers pointed out that any decrease in pain greater than 50% is considered a clinically meaningful and substantial change for neck pain. Additionally the chiropractic patients had greater reductions in medication usage. They wrote that the "lack of serious adverse events, tolerability, and high adherence to care suggest the combination of SMT with home exercise is an effective treatment in seniors with chronic NP."

Chiropractic care included a diversified, thrust technique, mobilization, and a low-velocity type of joint oscillation, for a maximum of 20 sessions. The force and type of SMT was individualized, and adjunct therapy included heat and ice therapy, massage, and assisted stretching. Home exercise consisted of simple exercises for balance, coordination, and flexibility taught by a chiropractor or exercise therapist. Supervised exercise consisted of 20, one-hour sessions monitored by an exercise therapist.

Neck pain affects an estimated 20% of adults over the age of 70. Unfortunately, many elderly patients suffer from coexisting conditions, and because of the possibility of drug

interference, cannot use prescription painkillers. Others may wish to use drug-free treatments out of personal preference. This makes conservative treatments like chiropractic care all the more important for the management of neck pain in the elderly.

References

Maiers M, et al. Spinal manipulative therapy and exercise for seniors with chronic neck pain. The Spine Journal 2013; doi10.1016/j.spinee.2013.10.035.