

Safety of Neck Manipulation Key Messages

Primary Messages

- There are risks and benefits to all treatments; however, the chance of experiencing a serious adverse event following neck manipulation is extremely low.¹
- On the issue of cervical arterial dissection, the chiropractic profession relies on the largest and most credible research study² to date, which shows that a patient is as likely to have seen a medical doctor (MD) as a doctor of chiropractic (DC) in the week prior to a vertebral artery dissection. The evidence suggests those experiencing symptoms of a stroke in progress—such as severe headache and/or neck pain—may visit an MD or a DC for treatment.
- The strongest scientific evidence available refutes the assertion that rotation and extension of the neck during cervical manipulation can cause an arterial dissection.^{3, 4}
- As doctors, our diagnostic training and professional standards dictate that if we identify a patient with a stroke in progress, our next step is to make an appropriate referral or, if necessary, call 911.
- Millions of cervical manipulations are performed safely in the United States every year, providing patients relief from common forms of neck pain and headache, and helping them to get back to their normal activities.

Secondary Messages

- Doctors of chiropractic are trained to provide informed consent, which involves describing to patients the risks and benefits of all treatment options. (*The American Chiropractic Association supports informed consent. To review ACA's informed consent policy, [click here](#).*)
- Doctors of chiropractic have some of the lowest malpractice insurance premiums in health care because of the low risk associated with the treatments they utilize.

Additional Information

- Chiropractic services offer a conservative approach to pain that can often help people reduce or eliminate the need for riskier treatments.
 - A study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that spinal manipulative therapy and exercise are more effective at relieving neck pain than pain medication.⁵
 - Cervical manipulation has demonstrated physiological benefits. Studies have shown that it produces a consistent and significant increase in active range of motion.⁶

- The most common side effects associated with chiropractic care are temporary, mild and non-serious. These are typically symptoms of increased pain, radiating pain, and/or stiffness that usually resolve within 24 hours of treatment. Serious complications are rarely associated with chiropractic care.
- Using a conservative approach to pain makes sense before moving on to riskier treatments.
 - According to the Institute of Medicine, at least 1.5 million Americans are sickened, injured or killed each year by errors in prescribing, dispensing and taking medications.⁷
 - One study estimated 100,000 patients are hospitalized every year in the United States for serious gastrointestinal complications due to the use of common non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen and naproxen. There are about 16,500 NSAID-related deaths annually in the United States, making this the 15th most common cause of death.⁸
 - In 2013, there were 16,235 deaths involving prescription opioids, an increase of 1 percent from 2012. Total drug overdose deaths in 2013 hit 43,982, up 6 percent from 2012.⁹

References

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