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## Chiropractic Care Reduces the Odds of Low Back Surgery

By Mark Studin and Michael Schonfeld | November 2013

Back injuries are the most prevalent occupational injury in the United States. Few prospective studies have examined early predictors of spine surgery after work-related back injury. It was reported by Keeney et. al. in May 2013 that the chances of the patient undergoing lumbar spinal surgery vary dramatically changes depending upon what specialist they saw first.

Trauma, aging, improper body mechanics, and normal wear and tear can all injure your spine. Damage to any part of your back or pressure on the nerves in your spine can cause back pain and other symptoms. If you have ongoing back pain, maybe you've wondered — could back surgery help?

The rate of spinal fusion surgery has risen six fold in the United States over the past 20 years, according to federal figures, and the expensive procedure has become even more common than hip replacement. The rate of spinal fusions in the United States is about 150 per 100,000 people, according to federal data. In Australia, it is about one-third of that; in Sweden, it is about 40 per 100,000; and in Britain it is lower still.

Even by American health-care standards, the rise of spinal fusions has been remarkable. According to federal figures, the number of spinal fusions in the United States rose from 56,000 in 1994 to 465,000 in 2011.

Using Disability Risk studies by Keeney et. al., they examined the early predictors of lumbar spine surgery within 3 years among Washington State workers, with new workers compensation and temporary total disability claims for back injuries. In the sample of 1885 workers, 174 (9.2%) had a lumbar spine surgery within 3 years. Reduced odds of surgery were observed for those younger than 35 years, females, Hispanics, and those whose first provider was a chiropractor. Approximately 42.7% of workers who first saw a surgeon had surgery, in contrast to only 1.5% of those who saw a chiropractor. They concluded that there was a very strong association between surgery and first provider seen.

If back surgery is something you must seriously consider, consider this:

Back surgery is needed in only a small percentage of cases. Most back problems can be taken care of with nonsurgical treatments.

It was reported by McMorland, Suter, Casha, du Plessis, and Hurlbert in 2010 that over 250,000 patients a year undergo elective lumbar discectomy (spinal surgery) for the treatment of low back disc issues in the United States. The researchers did a comparative randomized clinical study comparing spinal microdiscectomy (surgery) performed by neurosurgeons to non-operative manipulative treatments (chiropractic adjustments) performed by chiropractors. They compared quality of life and disabilities of the patients in the study.

The study was limited to patients with distinct one-sided lumbar disc herniations as diagnosed via MRI and had associated radicular (nerve root) symptoms. Based upon the authors' review of available MRI studies, the patients participating in the study were all initially considered surgical candidates. Both the surgical and chiropractic groups reported no new neurological problems and had only minor post-treatment soreness. 60% of the patients who underwent chiropractic care reported a successful outcome while 40% required surgery and of those 40%, all reported successful outcomes. This study concluded that 60% of the potential surgical candidates had positive outcomes utilizing chiropractic as the alternative to surgery.

Choosing a conservative approach for your back injury requires choosing a conservative practitioner of healthcare that has been certified to equate to successful outcomes without surgery. Chiropractors are trained in a drugless/non-surgical approach to treating you and your back.

The bottom line is this: see a chiropractor first and the research supports that decision.

**42.7 Percent of Workers Consulted a Surgeon First - Had Surgery**  
**vs.**  
**1.5% Who Consulted a Chiropractor First - Had Surgery**