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## **Work Injuries, Full Recovery and Chiropractic Care, Resolving the myth that doing nothing is better**

By William Owens and Mark Studin | June 2010

Thousands of people have realized the benefits of receiving chiropractic after a traumatic injury at work. Many of the things we are employed to do often cause injuries to the neck or the lower back. This can include repetitive lifting, bending, twisting and sitting at a desk or computer for a prolonged period of time. It is incorrect to assume that because you are lifting car engines or leaning over a desk for 8 continuous hours that you can't hurt your back. There is a term called "creep" that is used to describe a profound effect on the health of your spine and joints. In this case, "creep" refers to the change in shape one experiences as a result of constant stress, and is similar to pulling slowly and steadily on a bar of salt water taffy. If you were to do this for a while, the taffy would stretch and be reluctant to return to its original position. That is why postural trauma, such as sedentary work or driving for long distances, can have negative consequences over time.

A doctor of chiropractic is trained to evaluate this type of condition as well as injuries to the spine that result quickly from a single incident. Both can have profound negative effects on your body and can cause pain and loss of function. Proper treatment for work related injuries is critical to returning to work in a timely manner and preventing recurrence. Although pain is an important part of the evaluation process of work related injuries, functional status (the ability to carry out one's activities) is equally important; you need to be out of pain and be able to do what you want and need to get done without any limitations. Your chiropractor wants you to get you back to your normal routine as quickly as possible and should then work with you to stay that way.

In a recent research paper published in 2009, the authors stated, "Over the last 15 years, the percentage of pre-retirement disabled US workers has increased from 5% to 9% such that more people receive disability income than are unemployed." (Aspegren et al., 2009, p. 765). This has tremendous implications on the workforce, productivity of businesses and your ability to earn a living. The data for the study was listed by the authors as records containing 249 patients ranging from the age of 18 to 65 years (mean = 38.3 years, SD = 10.7 years, 84 women) with dates of service ranging from January 1, 2003 to December 31, 2006. These were retrospectively analyzed (100 records were used). Based on date of injury to first date of chiropractic care, the cases were subdivided into acute (0-21days), subacute (22-90 days), and chronic (>90 days) injured workers.

One powerful conclusion of the research was that workers in the acute or subacute groups had better treatment scores than patients with a chronic condition. This indicates that the sooner the patient

received chiropractic treatment, the better the outcomes. Access and treatment is the key to long term success in the workforce.

### **MYTH: Problems resolve themselves**

The idea that lower back pain has a “natural history” and will resolve on its own has been recently challenged in the scientific literature. Several papers have reported actual statistics. “Hestbaek et al, Carey et al, and later Nicholson and Jonsson who describe how acute low back pain becomes chronic or recurrent more frequently than previously suspected. Jayson expanded on these concerns, noting at 3 months that the natural history prognosis [allowing it to get better on its own] for patients having experienced an acute episode of low back pain was as follows: 27% were completely better, 28% improved, 30% had no change, and 14% were actually worse” (Aspegren et al., 2009, p. 768). The idea that pain in your lower back gets better is actually a myth; the results show that 75% of participants actually had pain that continued and 44% had no change or got worse. Thinking it will go away is just not a good idea.

The conclusion of this study was, “Patients recorded improvement in functional scores and subjective response involving work-related spinal injuries. Improvement was noted in all 3 time-based phases of patient status (acute, subacute, and chronic)” (Aspegren et al., 2009, p. 770). Therefore, when you have a work related injury, although care is most effective when you see a doctor of chiropractic as soon after the injury as possible, patients seeking care 90 days or greater after the injury will still receive tremendous benefit from chiropractic care. In other words, the sooner you see a doctor, the better chance you have of recovery, but better later than never.

Being cared for by a doctor of chiropractic is an essential and effective way to decrease pain and increase function. Full recovery from a work related injury and the assurance that you will be able to continue your job, with no limitations, is everyone’s goal. The doctor of chiropractic works with both you, the patient, and your employer to ensure that you do recover and are able to return to work, with as little disability time as possible, functioning in your full capacity with no limitations.