

Are Spinal Adjustments Dangerous?

Chiropractic spinal adjustments are extremely safe when performed by chiropractors. In fact, chiropractic adjustments are among the safest treatments for most back and neck problems. According to a 1993 Ontario Ministry of Health commissioned study,

"There is no clinical or case-control study that demonstrates or even implies that chiropractic spinal manipulation is unsafe in the treatment of low-back pain. Some medical treatments are equally safe, but others are unsafe and generate iatrogenic (doctor-induced) complications for low-back pain patients. Our reading of the literature suggests that chiropractic manipulation is safer than medical management of low-back pain."

Lead investigator of the study, Pran Manga, Ph.D., however, did warn that spinal adjustments performed by health care professionals other than qualified doctors of chiropractic were potentially harmful and less effective:

"Indeed, several existing medical therapies of low-back pain are generally contraindicated on the basis of the existing clinical trials. There is also some evidence in the literature to suggest that spinal manipulations are less safe and less effective when performed by nonchiropractic professionals."

On December 8, 1994, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR) of the US Department of Health and Human Services released clinical practice guidelines for the management of acute low back pain. Their guidelines were developed after extensive study of the diagnostic and treatment methods used for acute low back pain. Their findings included:

- The risk of serious complications from lumbar spinal manipulation is rare;
- Conservative treatment such as spinal manipulation should be pursued in most cases before considering surgical intervention;
- Prescription drugs such as oral steroids, antidepressant medications and colchicine are not recommended for acute low back problems.