

Educating Older Patients About Good Health by Dr. Mark Charrette

Aging is an unavoidable fact of life, and our country as a whole is getting older as more and more baby boomers approach retirement age. How can we chiropractors reach out to the middle-aged population and explain how chiropractic care can help them continue to lead active, healthy lives as they get older? How can we create a nation of healthier older people?

Health education is the key. We need to change the way people think about their bodies. Most people don't realize that the human body is an architectural structure, just like any building, and structure dictates function. They do not understand that structural imbalances such as pronation and forward head carriage can have a serious impact on health. Postural imbalances put the body in compromised structural positions, leaving it more susceptible to injury and degenerative changes. Pronation and forward head carriage can cause degenerative changes throughout the body, which can eventually affect the nervous system at the level of the spinal nerves and even the spinal cord.

Explain to your patients that the best way for them to stay healthy as they age is through a combination of adjustments, support for the adjustment (which might include custom-made stabilizing orthotics and cervical support pillows) and rehabilitative exercise. Adjustments free up restricted joints and correct misalignments. Custom-made stabilizing orthotics support the feet, which are the foundation of the body, and provide a symmetrical base upon which proper posture can be built. Cervical support pillows keep the spine supported in its normal lordotic curve while they are asleep, and can help adjustments hold longer. Of course, your specific program of care may vary depending on your preferences and your patients' unique needs and goals.

If you educate your middle-aged patients about how chiropractic care can enhance athletic performance, help prevent injuries, limit degenerative changes, and facilitate an overall healthier lifestyle, they will be more motivated to stick with their program of care. They will also be more likely to recommend chiropractic care to others, including their peers, children and/or parents.

Confronting the Upcoming Osteoarthritis Spike

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds. It is estimated that 70 percent to 90 percent of people older than age 75 are affected by osteoarthritis.¹ In fact, up to 33 percent of people older than 18 in the United States report symptoms of arthritis or chronic joint pain.² The clinical symptoms of osteoarthritis include use-related joint pain, stiffness of joints after inactivity, restricted range of motion, and joint crepitus. Middle-aged baby boomers are approaching the peak years for the development of arthritic conditions and will most likely account for a large increase in cases of osteoarthritis over the next few decades.

It's a commonly held belief that degenerative changes and osteoarthritis are natural consequences of aging, but this is simply not true. The amount of degenerative changes can be significantly limited by maintaining symmetrical posture, joint mobility, and muscle tone. Osteoarthritis results from an ongoing process of wear and tear over a lifetime and is not an inevitable consequence of aging.³ Educating your patients about the steps they can take to minimize their risk of developing osteoarthritis is one way to help them realize how beneficial chiropractic care can be.

Medical management of osteoarthritis often includes the use of pain-reducing drugs. These drugs can have serious side effects and do not increase function or inhibit the progression of the disease. Chiropractic care improves biomechanical function by restoring normal motion to

the spine, relaxing tight muscles, improving joint coordination and inhibiting pain.⁴ Chiropractic can improve joint function and reduce symptoms in patients who already have osteoarthritis, as well as reduce the wear and tear that leads to osteoarthritis.

Patients at risk for osteoarthritis can also benefit from custom-made stabilizing orthotics that provide them with a solid, symmetrical foundation. When people have structural faults in their feet, it translates into biomechanical dysfunction in the joints above - extending as far up as the cervical spine. Research has shown that custom-made, flexible orthotics improve shock absorption, reduce stress on the knee joint⁵ and improve the Q angle, which puts less stress on the hip.⁶

It is important for you to educate your middle-aged patients about the ways in which chiropractic can help them reduce their risk of developing painful and disabling osteoarthritis. This disease can rob them of their independence and vitality, but it is not an inevitable result of getting older. Chiropractic care can offer them a preventative solution.

Good Health: A Lifetime Occupation

We have an obligation to educate our patients about the benefits of chiropractic. When your middle-aged patients see results and understand how chiropractic can keep them feeling young and healthy, they will be more likely to seek your care and to refer their family and friends. No matter how old you are, you've only got one body - and it's never too late to start taking care of it. Let's show our patients of all ages how chiropractic can help them achieve better health.

References

- 1.Hinton R, et al. Osteoarthritis: diagnosis and therapeutic considerations. *American Family Physician*, 2002;65(5):841-848.
- 2.Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevalence of self-reported arthritis or chronic joint symptoms among adults - United States, 2001. *MMWR*, 2002;51(42):948-950.
- 3.Oddis CV. New perspectives on osteoarthritis. *Am J Med*, 1996 Feb 26;100(SA):10S-15S.
- 4.Seaman DR. Chiropractic and Pain Control: The Interactive Workbook for Chiropractic. Lake Lure 1995:26.
- 5.Johnston LB, Gross MT. Effects of foot orthoses on quality of life for individuals with patellofemoral pain syndrome. *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther*, 2004 Aug;34(8):440-448.
- 6.Kuhn DR, Yochum TR, Cherry AR, Rodgers SS. Immediate changes in the quadriceps femoris angle after insertion of an orthotic device. *J Manip Physiol Ther*, 2002 Sept;25(7):465-470.