

VAN DAM CHIROPRACTIC

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HEADACHES AND CERVICOGENIC PAIN

When the Pain in Your Head Starts in Your Neck

Most people reach for a bottle of ibuprofen when a headache hits. That works sometimes, but for a significant portion of headache sufferers, the real source of the problem is not inside the skull at all. It is in the cervical spine, specifically the upper three vertebrae, which share nerve pathways with the trigeminal nerve that supplies sensation to much of the head and face.

This type of headache has a name: cervicogenic headache. It originates in the neck and refers pain upward into the head, often mimicking tension headaches or even migraines. Patients frequently describe a dull, one-sided ache that starts at the base of the skull and creeps forward toward the eye or temple. Neck stiffness and reduced range of motion are almost always present. Many patients have lived with these episodes for years without anyone examining the cervical spine as a possible source.



What the Research Shows

A randomized controlled trial published in Spine found that spinal manipulative therapy produced significantly greater improvement in cervicogenic headache frequency and intensity compared to a low-load exercise program alone.(1) The cervical joints, muscles, and soft tissues are in constant communication with the brain, and when that communication is disrupted by joint restriction or muscle tension, pain signals can travel in unexpected directions.

Chiropractors assess the cervical spine for segmental dysfunction, restricted joint movement, or biomechanical abnormalities. Adjustments to those segments restore normal motion, reduce nerve irritation, and interrupt the pain cycle. Many patients who have cycled through medications for years find

meaningful relief once the mechanical component of their headaches is properly identified and addressed. The shift from managing symptoms to correcting the underlying cause is often what changes the long-term picture.

More Than Just Pain Relief

Regular chiropractic care for patients with cervicogenic headache is not just about reducing acute episodes. Restoring proper cervical alignment reduces the chronic muscular guarding that keeps the neck locked up between flare-ups. Patients also often notice improvements in neck mobility and sleep quality as secondary benefits. Over time, the frequency and severity of episodes tend to decrease as the spine maintains better function between visits. If headaches are a recurring part of life, it is worth asking whether the neck has ever been properly evaluated. The answer might be sitting right at the top of the spine.



HUMOR

- **What do you call a fish without eyes?**
A fsh.
- **Why did the bicycle fall over?**
Because it was two-tired.
- **What do you call cheese that isn't yours?**
Nacho cheese.
- **What do you call a sleeping dinosaur?**
A dino-snore.
- **Why did the math book look so sad?**
Because it had too many problems.

CORE STABILITY & LOW BACK HEALTH

The word "core" gets used constantly in fitness culture, usually in reference to getting six-pack abs. But the core's actual job has nothing to do with aesthetics. It is a three-dimensional cylinder of muscle that wraps around the lumbar spine, including the deep stabilizers like the transversus abdominis, multifidus, pelvic floor, and diaphragm. These muscles fire before any arm or leg movement begins, bracing the spine in anticipation of load.

When that system breaks down, the lumbar spine absorbs stress it was never designed to handle alone. Discs compress unevenly, facet joints get overloaded, and the surrounding musculature tightens up to compensate. This is one of the most well-documented pathways to chronic low back pain. Left unaddressed, those compensation patterns tend to become self-reinforcing, making the problem harder to unwind over time.

Where Chiropractic Fits In

A chiropractor evaluating a patient with low back pain is not just looking at where it hurts. They are assessing spinal alignment, movement patterns, and whether joint restrictions are preventing the core stabilization system from engaging properly. A lumbar vertebra that is restricted or misaligned sends distorted feedback to the muscles that are supposed to support it. Those muscles then either under fire or over fire, creating instability or chronic tension.

Research published in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* found that spinal manipulation combined with stabilization exercises produced greater long-term reductions in low back pain and disability than either approach used alone. (2) That combination makes mechanical sense: adjustments restore joint mobility and normalize neurological input, while targeted exercise rebuilds the muscular support the spine needs. Patients who understand this connection tend to engage more actively in their own recovery.

Building a Resilient Spine

Patients who address both components, spinal alignment and core function, tend to have fewer recurrences than those who focus on only one. A spine that moves well is a spine the nervous system can actually communicate with. Once that feedback loop is restored, the deep stabilizers can resume their job. Consistency matters here; sporadic care rarely produces the same lasting results as a structured plan that includes both adjustment and rehabilitation.



Low back pain is the leading cause of disability worldwide. Much of it is mechanical in origin, which means much of it is addressable without surgery or long-term medication.

ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE & INJURY PREVENTION

Why Elite Athletes Use Chiropractic

It is not a coincidence that virtually every professional sports team in North America has a chiropractor on staff. Athletes place extraordinary demands on the musculoskeletal system, and performance at the highest level requires more than strength and conditioning. It requires the nervous system to fire accurately, joints to move freely, and the body to recover efficiently between sessions. Chiropractic care directly supports all three.



Joint restrictions in the spine or extremities do not always cause pain, especially in well-conditioned athletes who have compensated for them. But those compensations come with a cost: altered movement patterns, reduced power output, and increased injury risk at the sites doing the extra work. Catching and correcting those restrictions early is far less costly than managing the injuries they eventually produce.

The Biomechanics of Better Performance

A pitcher with restricted thoracic rotation will recruit more aggressively from the shoulder and elbow to generate the same velocity. A runner with a restricted sacroiliac joint will shift load to the hip flexors or knee. These compensations are invisible until they produce an overuse injury, which often occurs months after the original restriction developed.

Chiropractic assessment identifies those restrictions before they cascade into injury. Research published in the *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine* demonstrated that athletes receiving regular chiropractic care showed measurable improvements in reaction time, agility, and proprioception compared to control groups. (3) Proprioception, the body's sense of its own position in space, depends heavily on accurate signaling from spinal and joint mechanoreceptors. Adjustments stimulate those receptors, essentially recalibrating the system. For athletes whose split-second timing and spatial awareness matter, that recalibration can directly translate into better performance.

Recovery Is Part of Performance

Recovery is where adaptation happens, and anything that accelerates it gives an athlete a real edge. Chiropractic adjustments reduce joint inflammation, improve circulation to surrounding soft tissues, and lower the resting tension of muscles that have been working hard. Athletes often report that regular care allows them to train more consistently without the accumulation of stiffness and restriction that would otherwise force rest days.

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Whether the patient is a weekend recreational runner or a professional competing at the highest level, the underlying principle holds: a body that moves well, recovers well. Investing in spinal health is not separate from athletic investment; it is a core part of it.

RESEARCH AND CHIROPRACTIC

THERE SEEMS TO BE NO END TO THE CONDITIONS THAT RESPOND TO CHIROPRACTIC CARE – PHYSICAL AS WELL AS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS. THAT IS BECAUSE CHIROPRACTIC DOES NOT “TREAT” A PARTICULAR CONDITION. CHIROPRACTIC CARE “TREATS” OR MORE ACCURATELY “CORRECTS” A SERIOUS INTERFERENCE TO BRAIN, NERVOUS SYSTEM AND ENERGY FUNCTION KNOWN AS THE SUBLUXATION. NO MATTER WHAT CONDITION YOU OR A LOVED ONE MAY HAVE, YOU WILL ALWAYS FUNCTION BETTER WHEN FREE FROM SUBLUXATIONS. CHIROPRACTORS ARE UNIQUELY TRAINED TO LOCATE AND CORRECT SUBLUXATIONS. ENJOY THIS MONTH’S CASES AND SEE MORE NEXT MONTH.



Neck Pain & Spinal Manipulation: A study published in the Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics (4) compared chiropractic care with medication for patients with acute and subacute neck pain. Researchers found that chiropractic patients reported faster and greater improvements in both pain levels and overall function, with spinal manipulation showing greater benefits than drug-based management. For patients looking for a non-pharmaceutical approach to neck pain, the evidence is solid.



Blood Pressure & the Atlas Vertebra: Published in the Journal of Human Hypertension (5), this study examined the effect of a single chiropractic adjustment to the Atlas vertebra, the topmost bone in the cervical spine, on blood pressure in patients with hypertension. The results were striking. Participants experienced a significant drop in blood pressure following the adjustment, an outcome that researchers compared to taking two blood pressure medications simultaneously. This highlights the significant impact

that spinal alignment can have on bodily systems that extend far beyond just the muscles and bones.



WORDS OF WISDOM

A healthy outside starts from the inside.

Robert Ulrich

Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live.

Jim Rohn

He who has health has hope, and he who has hope has everything.

Arabian Proverb

In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks.

John Muir

Van Dam Chiropractic would like to thank you for the many referrals of friends and family to our office.

As a special Thank You, if you refer someone to Van Dam Chiropractic and they put your name down as the referral, Dr. Van Dam will send you a

\$10 GIFT CARD TO STARBUCKS

We know there are a lot of choices of doctors for your healthcare and we thank you for choosing us!

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