

Chiropractic Does Not Increase Risk of Stroke

A new study finds there is no evidence of excess risk of stroke following chiropractic spinal manipulation, according to a February 2008 report in the journal *Spine*. The study notes that patients are no more likely to suffer a stroke following chiropractic treatment than they would after visiting their family doctor's office.

There is a small artery called the vertebrbasilar artery (VBA) that passes through the neck vertebrae and into the base of the skull. This helps supply blood to the brain.

It is suspected that in extremely rare cases, manipulation of the neck can damage this artery, which causes formation of a blood clot. This clot can then break free, travel into the brain, block circulation and cause a stroke.

A research paper published in 2001 in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found there is only a one-in-5.85-million risk that a chiropractic neck adjustment can cause a stroke. In terms of medical procedures, this is considered very rare.

The new study in February 2008 looked at 9 years of data in Ontario and found 818 patients with a VBA stroke among 11.5 million people. The same number of people went to either the chiropractor or the family doctor.

The study found equal numbers of strokes from visits to both types of doctors. This is most likely due to patients already having a problem in the vertebral artery before the stroke actually occurs. They were seeking care for neck pain and headache, the most common early symptoms.

According to the study's authors, "Because the association between chiropractor visits and VBA stroke is not greater than the association between PCP (family doctor) visits and VBA stroke, there is no excess risk of VBA stroke from chiropractic care."

If you have a sudden onset of headache, neck or face pain that is different than you have had before, you should watch for other signs. Often the pain can be very severe and this is what causes people to seek chiropractic or medical care.

You should suspect a stroke is in progress if you have difficulty smiling, raising both arms, standing steady with your eyes closed, double vision or speaking a simple sentence such as "Simple Simon says".

If you suspect a stroke is in progress, call 911 immediately and get to the emergency room. Treatment can be effective if given within 3 hours to avoid a stroke which can cause permanent damage.

Doctors of chiropractic are trained to watch for these symptoms. This most recent study confirms that chiropractic manipulation is a safe and appropriate course of treatment.

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