

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## What Should I Tell My Doctor?

### Don't Minimize Your Symptoms

The first step in securing the correct treatment plan for your pain and discomfort is to tell your doctor about all your symptoms and any changes in those symptoms as the treatment progresses. Do not minimize symptoms: even if you feel that they are not related to your condition, your doctor needs to know about them. You should also be completely honest about your lifestyle. For example, if you use tobacco, alcohol, or illicit drugs, tell your doctor. This information will be held in the strictest confidence and will only help to guide your doctor toward the most appropriate plan of care.

Tell your doctor:

- When your symptoms started,
- What they feel like,
- How they are affecting your life,
- What makes the symptoms better and worse, and
- Be specific. The more specific your explanation, the more helpful it is.

### What Is Considered an Emergency?

If you experience any of the following, you should seek help immediately, particularly if any of these symptoms were not present during your initial examination, or if they have worsened:

- Paralysis
- Loss of bowel and/or bladder control
- Loss of vision
- Slurred speech
- Chest pain under your breast bone
- Shortness of breath
- A severe unrelenting headache that is worse than any you have ever had.



*All information shared with your doctor will be held in the strictest confidence and will only help to guide your doctor toward the most appropriate plan of care.*

There are myriad causes for spine and joint pain. The most common is a simple biomechanical problem: a joint is injured and is not functioning correctly. On the other hand, serious diseases of the heart, blood vessels, abdominal organs, and even infections can also result in spine and extremity (arm or leg) pain.

Any change in your condition, positive or negative, can impact your health. Talk to your doctor if you feel that you should be progressing faster than you are. Knowing this will help him or her plan an appropriate

treatment program—to optimize your health as quickly and safely as possible.

### **What Are the Warning Signs of a Potentially Serious Problem?**

The following signs or symptoms can indicate a more serious problem. Be sure to tell your doctor of chiropractic as soon as you start experiencing them, even if it means calling after office hours.

**Your pain extends into your arm, leg, chest or abdomen.** Pain extending beyond the spine can represent a simple mechanical problem—or a serious condition. For example, pain extending into your arm(s) may be secondary to a heart problem. The sooner your doctor knows this, the sooner the problem can be addressed.

**You have progressive severe pain.** Under the care of any doctor, you should begin to feel some relief within a reasonable period of time. If, at any point, your health begins to deteriorate, inform your doctor immediately. Pain is a warning sign that something is wrong with your body. Progressive pain often signifies a condition that should be investigated by your doctor as soon as possible.

**You develop neurological signs or symptoms.** Numbness and tingling, although not always, are typically signs that a nerve is being compressed. This compression can occur secondary to problems with the discs in your spine, osteophytes (bone spurs) that are compressing nerves, or even from diseases like diabetes.

**Your pain becomes worse when you rest, or awakens you at night.** Night pain is generally an indication that a more serious condition is present. Generally, though not always, this occurs in older patients and should NEVER be ignored.

**You cannot find a comfortable position.** Most people

with musculoskeletal problems can find a position where they feel relatively comfortable. If you cannot find such a position, it may indicate a disease of the organs in your abdomen, chest or skull. For example, abnormal expansion of the abdominal aorta (the large blood vessel in your abdomen that supplies blood to your legs) can result in back pain that is unrelieved by positional changes. Such symptoms need to be investigated quickly.

**You develop a fever.** Fever can be a sign of infection or it can be associated with other conditions, such as arthritis. You should notify your doctor immediately if you develop a fever.

You should also inform your doctor of chiropractic if you start receiving any other treatments from a medical doctor, physical therapist, massage therapist, or other health care provider. In addition, any self-treatment with vitamins, supplements, herbal medicines, or over-the-counter medications should be reported. ■

### **ACA** American Chiropractic Association

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at [www.acatoday.org](http://www.acatoday.org) or call 800-986-4636.

*Lawrence H. Wyatt, DC, DACBR, FICC, Professor,  
Division Of Clinical Sciences,  
Texas Chiropractic College, **Writer***

*Nataliya Schetchikova, PhD, **Editor***



This patient information page is a public service of the Journal of the American Chiropractic Association. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for a diagnosis by a specialist. For specific information concerning your health condition, consult your doctor of chiropractic. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by doctors of chiropractic and other healthcare professionals to educate patients. Any other reproduction is subject to ACA approval.