Choosing a Doctor of Chiropractic

You've got a headache—or back, shoulder, or leg pain—and you're looking for a doctor of chiropractic (DC) to help with your problem. How do you make that decision? Should the size of the Yellow Pages advertisement be the determining factor? Selecting the right health care provider for your needs is important. The following suggestions are designed to simplify the decision-making process.
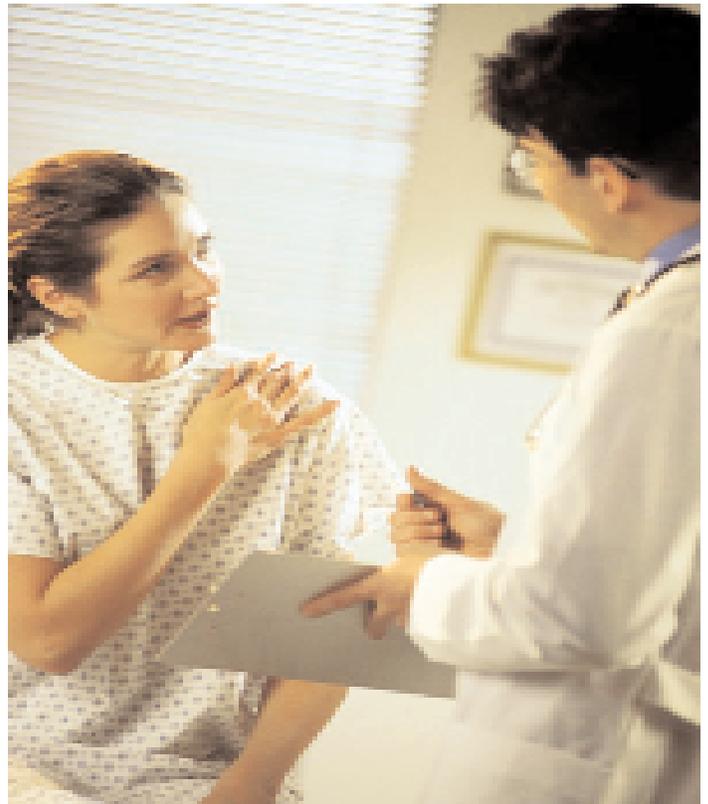
What qualifications should my chiropractor have?

The first step is to ensure that your DC graduated from a school accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE). The CCE (www.cce-usa.org) is the national agency that accredits chiropractic colleges in the United States. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Second, make sure that the chiropractor that you've selected is licensed in your particular state. (To find your state's licensing board, go to www.fclb.org and click on "Chiropractic Boards".) You can also contact the state board of chiropractic examiners to see if any sanctions have been placed on your doctor for state law violations. (Go to www.acatoday.org and click on "About Us" – "Related Organizations" – "State Boards".) Also, be sure that your chiropractor is a member of the American Chiropractic Association. (Go to www.acatoday.org and click on "Find a doctor.")

How do I choose the chiropractor that's right for me?

The best source is often a referral from a relative or friend who has had good experiences with a doctor. Referral from another health care practitioner is also generally helpful. Just as you wouldn't continue to see a medical doctor who refused to refer you to a good chiropractor for problems with your musculoskeletal system, you should also refrain from selecting a chiropractic doctor who refuses to send you to an MD when necessary.

A good chiropractor might offer you safer and more effective non-drug and/or non-surgical approaches to your problems. The chiropractic profession believes in a conservative approach to health care (utilizing non-drug, non-surgical methods, when appropriate, as first-line therapies) and holism (considering the body as an interdependent whole, rather than focusing only on the single "part" that is causing pain). Remember that any good physician will address the physical, social, and psychological aspects of your problems with conservative approaches, as appropriate.

What are the benefits of chiropractic care?

Research shows that proper maintenance of your musculoskeletal system is important to your health. We suspect that pain in the joints caused by a reduction of normal joint motion is a common reason for many non-surgical musculoskeletal problems. Most chiropractors address these problems with spinal manipulation, exercise, and other types of active treatment.

A reputable doctor of chiropractic will teach you how to maintain your musculoskeletal system through exercise, good posture, and good lifting techniques. He or she will also describe good health habits, such as the elements of a healthy diet. Your doctor of chiropractic will focus on helping you prevent future episodes of pain and disability, rather than suggesting that periodic, ongoing adjustment of your spine alone will solve your health problems. A good chiropractor will evaluate your condition and inform you of your progress at each visit.

What diagnostic procedures are appropriate?

Your chiropractor has many well-documented diagnostic procedures to help evaluate your condition that include asking you questions about your health and giving you a physical examination. Chiropractors may use x-rays to help determine the health of your musculoskeletal system and to see if your body has developed any serious conditions that should be managed by another provider. There are specific well-documented reasons for performing x-rays. A reputable DC will x-ray only the patients who require it. Feel free to question your chiropractor about the need for x-rays in your case, about the percentage of patients x-rayed in his or her office, or about any other diagnostic or treatment procedure that is unclear to you. Remember that it is not a good idea to x-ray you periodically to see if changes in your vertebral misalignments have occurred.

Musculoskeletal problems can exist for many reasons and can occur in any part of the system. A good doctor of chiropractic will evaluate your overall health, keeping up with the philosophy of holism, and will formulate a diagnosis for your condition, as required by most state laws.

How long should my chiropractor treat me?

Any good health care provider will work hard to get you out of the office and functioning independently as quickly as possible. Joint manipulation is a wonderful non-invasive procedure in the hands of a skilled doctor of chiropractic. It has been repeatedly shown to reduce pain and help patients function better in daily life. It has not been shown, however, to prevent problems. A good chiropractor will help you prevent musculoskeletal system problems by teaching you how to engage in regular exercise, maintain good posture, and practice other healthy living habits.

There are thousands of good chiropractors available to help you manage your neuromusculoskeletal system with sound, well-documented procedures. As with any other health care decision, remember that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Choose a chiropractor you are comfortable with, who addresses your health concerns, and who uses sound principles of modern health care in helping you manage your problems.

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For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit ACA's website at www.acatoday.org/patients.

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