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Is Cracking One's Own Neck and Low Back Safe?

“NO!” As a youngster, you might have been told to, “stop cracking your knuckles, because it makes them big and disfigured!” That advice holds true for those who “crack” their own necks, bones between the shoulder blades and low backs. Excessive manipulation, whether performed by a practitioner or oneself, could lead to several serious conditions:

- Tendons, which hold bones in place, becoming loose or torn as a result of too many quick stretches;
- Ligaments losing their elasticity;
- Muscles becoming tight, spastic, and painful; and
- Nerves becoming irritated, resulting in numbness, tingling, and weakness.

Here's why. 1) When one self-manipulates, the bones that produce the audible click, are from joints too loose! The joints that really need to be mobilized are not moved because one cannot self-direct a specific manipulation to a tight segment. 2) Usually, only one or two vertebra in the neck or low back, not an entire region of the spine [which is what occurs when one self-manipulates] necessarily need to be moved. “Cracking” makes the loose bones move even more which increases instability and the desire to do it again. The tight bones left untouched become harder to manipulate, which creates imbalance in the spine, more pain later, then the desire to self-manipulate again within a few hours. 3) The specific direction, force and depth of manipulation can only be performed by a spinal specialist.

This vicious cycle of feeling tightness and pain, “cracking” one's self, and pain again must be stopped for the reasons outlined above. The only way to achieve this is by restoring balance in the spine. Chiropractic neurologists are eminently qualified to perform this service.

After safety and effectiveness limits have been set by your doctor, short-term treatment plans should be established. Obviously, there are many benefits derived from getting the patient well as quickly as possible- less time lost from work, greater enjoyment of leisure, decreased health care costs, and, most important, lower risk of over-treatment.

Many ask why some chiropractors require patients to “keep coming back” long after the pain has subsided and push “maintenance care” once a month. Although diseases of the heart and liver often do not cause ‘hurt’ when malfunctioning, the spine sends pain signals when malfunctioning. To

discontinue therapy to the spine “when it stops hurting” is, most times, good procedure unless, of course, spinal decompression for discs out-of-place, exercise rehabilitation and stretching are prescribed. Each treatment should have a purpose, with its intended outcome explained clearly. Your understanding and involvement in the healing process is as important as receiving quality chiropractic neurological care. This is why I often inquire about one’s daily living and work activities.

The end result of such abuses is a long-term break-down of joints, commonly known as degenerative joint disease, which features roughening of bone gliding surfaces (articular cartilage) as surrounding membranes become inflamed and internal lubricating fluids (synovial fluid) thicken.

The importance of minimizing irritation to any bodily structure, be it from manipulations, drug dosages, or various therapies, should always be in the forefront of every physicians mind.

In Health,

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