

## Does It Work? Is It Safe?

These are two questions you should always ask yourself when you are considering a particular approach to Health Care. If you are experiencing common back pain - in other words, pain and stiffness in your neck, shoulders, upper back or lower back that is due to functional problems like sprains, strains, joint restrictions, trigger points in muscles and inflammation - you are in good company. Nearly three out of four Canadian adults have suffered with back pain at some point over the last two years.

Surveys conducted by the Environics Research Group have found that Canadians are increasingly choosing Chiropractic care ( and Massage Therapy ) for their back pain. So Chiropractic care is more popular than ever, but is it safe? And, does it work?

Safety is the most important aspect of any intervention that is intended to improve your health and well-being or any treatment that is meant to temporarily relieve your suffering. "Firstly, do no harm" is a guiding ethic of all Health Care professionals. Another basic principle of Health Care delivery is the risk/benefit ratio. Or the benefit to risk ratio. Either way that you do the math, both patients and practitioners want the most benefit for the least risk.

Which brings us to the subject of NSAID's. These are Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs. They block the physiological pathways which are responsible for inflammation, fever and pain. In North America at least two-thirds of people with chronic low back pain are prescribed NSAID's - alone or in conjunction with other drugs. Because of the way they work to reduce inflammation, NSAID's also reduce the stomach's ability to protect itself from the erosive action of digestive juices. Gastrointestinal ulcers and hemorrhage, sometimes with severe and life-threatening blood loss, are common problems arising from the continued use of NSAID's. Best estimates are a hospitalization rate of 0.4% and a death rate of 0.04%.

How do these rates of risk compare to the risks associated with other treatments? This is known as Relative Risk and here are some facts for you to consider.

30% is the incidence of adverse drug reactions in hospitalized patients

10% is the incidence of psychosis due to corticosteroid therapy

1% is the incidence of paralysis due to neurosurgery in the neck

0.1% is the incidence of seizures due to the DPT vaccine

0.01% is the incidence of breast cancer caused by mammography

0.001% is the incidence of death due to anaesthetic agents used in surgery

0.0001% is the incidence of death due to lightning strike

0.00001% is the incidence of serious neural complications due to neck manipulation (by all types of practitioners)

“Chiropractic care is widely recognized as one of the safest , drug-free, surgery-free therapies available for the treatment of back and neck pain, headaches, and other musculoskeletal conditions. Few other therapies can demonstrate a better safety record for the treatment of spinal pain syndromes .”

For more specific information on the chiropractic profession and chiropractic care you can visit the Canadian Chiropractic Association website at [www.ccachiro.org](http://www.ccachiro.org) .

Next issue we will look at the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of chiropractic care for the common complaint of back pain.

Submitted by Dr. Dawn Armstrong, D.C.

This article appeared in the Comox Valley Health and Recreation Guide  
<http://www.comoxhealthandrecguide.com/>