

## **Sure It Works - But What'll It Cost Me ?**

Imagine that you've got a pain - a deep, gnawing, unrelenting ache in your low back and hip that grabs and bites you every time you get up from the couch.

What started as a pinch at the base of your spine, when you picked up your luggage at the airport after a long flight from New Zealand six years ago, has come to define your life. You've given up playing baseball with your kids. And gardening. And vacuuming. And wearing socks because it hurts too much to put them on. You had to give up a great job because it involved too much sitting, or too much standing - either way, it just hurt too much. You can't remember the last time you slept through the night.

It's a hard pain. You cannot pretend it isn't there because it's there every day, every time you reach to get a dish from the cupboard or bend over to pick up a toy from the floor. You've spent months and months doing physiotherapy exercises. You've tried electrical therapies, laser treatments, traction and ultrasound. It all helps a bit, for a little while, but no one can tell you why the pain isn't going away. It's not clear what's wrong even though you've had three sets of X-rays, two CT scans and one MRI. There's the ibuprofen and T3's and opiates - they take the edge off, but you're starting to worry what they might be doing to your stomach and your liver.

You've gained forty pounds, your blood pressure is going up and so is your blood sugar - the doctor has warned you that Type 2 Diabetes is looming on the horizon. Your feet hurt, your knees hurt and exercise feels impossible. You're waiting to hear about an appointment with yet another specialist. The months go by.

One morning, the phone rings, but it's not them. It is an invitation to take part in a clinical trial at a hospital in Saskatoon. Dr. Cassidy (a chiropractor) and Dr. Kirkaldy-Willis (an orthopedic surgeon) are researching the effectiveness/cost-effectiveness of chiropractic manipulation as a treatment for chronic low back pain.

You, along with 170 other people in the same situation of disabling pain (suffering on average for 7.6 years), will receive daily chiropractic manipulation for three weeks. So you decide you have nothing to lose for trying.

Three weeks later, 67% of the group - that's 114 people - achieved complete symptom relief and were quickly able to return to full function with no restrictions on their activities. Success was maintained on follow-up 12 months later and, most importantly, though not everyone found complete relief, no one was made worse. (This is an ever present possibility with surgery.)

Imagine then that you are one of the study participants who responded so well. What did it cost for your chiropractic care? If you do the math, 21 x \$45 (average price for a treatment) makes the total \$945. Getting your life back? Priceless!

World renowned economists from Canada (Dr. Pran Manga) and Australia (Prof. John Dillon) have concluded that when it comes to money and care for back pain, chiropractic is an extremely cheap option. Unlike primary medical practice it does not spiral costs into the system through specialist services, hospitalizations and pharmaceuticals. On average, a dollar spent on a chiropractor's services causes no further costs. In terms of cost-effectiveness a chiropractor can best be compared to a dentist. Both see the patient directly and generally provide all necessary diagnosis and treatment themselves.

If you or someone you care about is suffering with back pain and hasn't tried chiropractic care yet and you want more information, please go to [www.ccachiro.org](http://www.ccachiro.org) or visit the British Columbia Chiropractic Association's website.

For more details on the clinical trial, see Canadian Family Physician, March 1985 (Volume 31).

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