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*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## Treat the Cause, Not the Symptoms

In a chiropractic clinic, we see people with all sorts of problems. A typical day includes seeing patients who have problems with one or more joints, nerves, muscles, ligaments, tendons and, bursae. The number of different ways people have discovered to injure themselves is quite mind-boggling.

However, the thing that still surprises me the most is that many of the new patients entering our office are only looking for relief of their pain or other symptoms. Especially if the pain is interfering with whatever it is they like to do the most (such as golfing). A majority of them have tried the typically prescribed drugs (medications such as anti-inflammatories, muscle relaxers, pain-killers and even valium) without any long-term relief. They have still not realized that if the treatment or medication they were given previously only addressed the symptoms of the problem (inflammation, pain, muscle spasm), it was no wonder that these symptoms simply returned once the treatment or medication was discontinued. Frustrated, these new patients enter my office hoping that I might have a simple solution that will allow them to return to their pain-free lifestyle as soon as possible.

Often to their disappointment, I have to inform them that rarely is there a "quick-fix" for any problem. If that doesn't upset them, they usually are once I tell them that it is more important to identify and treat the actual cause of their problem than it is to temporarily relieve the pain or symptoms. This is the goal in our office. Instead of trying to find a new and quick way of eliminating their pain, we find out what needs to be treated in order to correct the actual problem. As well, we need to identify what needs to be changed in their lifestyle to prevent the problem from coming back. I will try to give you a couple of examples:

- 1) You have headaches.** Tylenol relieves them but they keep coming back. Instead of wondering what pill to try next, consider the following:
  - Have you tried to identify exactly what is causing the headaches or have just been trying to eliminate the pain?
  - Is your poor posture putting physical stress on your neck joints and muscles, causing headaches?

-How long do you spend sitting in front of a computer or television each day? Is your television or computer monitor positioned so that you do not have to move your head left or right, up or down?

-Are you taking any other medications that may cause headaches as a side effect? Ask your pharmacist.

-Have you experienced any trauma (car accident or fall) to your neck that may now be causing irritation of the nerves in your neck? This will result in spasm of the neck muscles and lead to tension headaches.

-Do you do any stretching or strengthening exercises for your neck? If your answer is no, you should almost expect the joints and muscles to eventually become stiff and tight, eventually causing headaches.

-How much emotional stress are you experiencing at home or work? Higher levels of this will definitely cause headaches.

**2) You have chronic bouts of low back pain.** The painkiller and muscle relaxer medications you were prescribed help only as long as you continue to take them. As well, they cause stomach upset and constipation. Does this sound like you? What are your answers to the following questions?

-Have you figured out what exactly is wrong with your back instead of just trying to eliminate the symptoms?

-Do you have poor muscle flexibility and/or joint mobility in your back, hips, or legs that will make you prone to low back injuries?

-Are you putting extra pressure on your low back every day by being overweight? Are you exercising enough each day to burn more calories than you eat in order to lose that extra weight?

-How much regular stretching and strengthening do you do for your back muscles?

-Do you have problems with the arches in your feet that may have secondary effects on your low back?

If you have headaches or chronic low back pain, it is likely you may be slightly disappointed with your own answers to the above questions. If that is your case, see a chiropractor so he or she can identify your actual problem and become your own personal coach on how to prevent it from returning. Solutions to many of these questions have already been discussed in past articles. They are all available on our website ([www.merrittchiro.com](http://www.merrittchiro.com)) under the “*weekly articles*” and “*free stretches and exercises*” sections.