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

Pain may not be Due to Arthritis Alone

Rarely does a day go by that I don't hear someone say "my back or neck is sore because I have arthritis". Yes, arthritis (most commonly in the form of osteoarthritis) can be a very painful and debilitating problem. However, it is not necessarily the primary reason why a person experiences low back or neck pain. In fact, a recent study of 500 people (250 of which had low back pain while the other 250 did not) found that there was no significant difference in the severity of osteoarthritis present between the two groups of people. What does this mean? It means that 250 of those 500 people had arthritis but did not have any low back pain.

As I explain to patients in my office, just because you have mild to moderate osteoarthritis does not mean that the symptoms you are experiencing are from that alone. However, if you do have some arthritis in your spine, you may be slightly more prone to having acute back or neck problem arise and it may take longer to conservatively treat the recent exacerbation.

For most people who enter my office with acute neck or back pain, most of their symptoms have only been present for a relatively short period of time. Even if they had some osteoarthritis in the affected area, it did not suddenly progress and cause the new bout of symptoms. Osteoarthritis generally comes on gradually at a slow rate, not suddenly within a week or so. If your symptoms came on quite quickly, something else is likely contributing to your problem.

In regards to neck or back pain, a common problem that many people have is actually what chiropractors call a "subluxation". This can be more likely to occur when osteoarthritis is present and is really just a combination of four problems: stiff and tight joints, irritated or pinched nerves, muscle spasm or tension, and inflammation or swelling around the joint and nerve. A subluxation can occur quickly, as in a heavy lift or a traumatic accident. As well, it can gradually occur over a long period of time with poor posture or a general inactivity. In regards to a subluxation gradually occurring, your joints and muscles may just have some mild stiffness that does not even cause you any real discomfort. However, this mild stiffness would make you

more prone to injuring the area. For example, one day you decide to dig up the entire garden while your back does not have its full mobility. By the next day, you can hardly get out of bed because the joints in your spine are even stiffer and inflamed, the inflammation is now irritating the nerves that exit the spine, which causes severe pain and muscle spasms. Again, the important thing to understand is that this scenario can occur whether you have mild to moderate osteoarthritis or not.

Once osteoarthritis is present, there is no form of treatment that will reverse these degenerative changes. However, you can treat and prevent the “subluxations” from occurring and the osteoarthritis from starting or progressing by restoring and maintaining the proper mobility in the joints. The more often and better your joints are able to move, the healthier they will remain and the better they will heal when they are injured. In a chiropractic office, receiving chiropractic “adjustments” in conjunction with regular exercise accomplishes this.