

# Dr. Colin Gage

---

Nicola Valley Chiropractic  
2076A Granite Ave.  
P.O. Box 909  
Merritt, BC  
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456  
Fax: (250) 378-8259  
Email: info@merrittchiro.com  
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

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

---

## The Upper Back

Let me start by giving you some “back” ground information, it is important to note that the thoracic spine (also called upper back, middle back, or mid-back) is very different in form and function than the cervical spine (neck) or the lumbar spine (lower back). While the neck and lower back are designed to provide us with mobility, the thoracic spine is designed to be very strong and stable to allow us to stand upright and to protect the vital internal organs in the chest. Because this section of the spinal column has a great deal of stability and only limited movement, there is generally little risk of injury or degeneration over time in the upper back compared to the neck and lower back.

Although upper back pain is not as common as neck and lower back pain, it can be a significant source of discomfort and pain when problems do occur. Upper back pain can occur as a result of trauma or sudden injury, or it can occur through strain or poor posture over time. As an example of the latter cause, in recent years, upper back pain has become a familiar complaint from people who work at computers most of the day. Often, upper back pain occurs along with headaches, neck pain, and/or shoulder pain.

The vast majority of cases of upper back pain are due to one (or both) of the following causes:

- 1) Muscular irritation (myofascial pain)
- 2) Joint dysfunction

### 1) Muscular irritation causing upper back pain

The shoulder girdle attaches by large muscles to the scapula (the shoulder blade) and the back of the thoracic rib cage. These large upper back muscles are prone to developing irritation (myofascial pain) that can be painful and difficult to work out. Often, muscular irritation and upper back pain is due to either de-conditioning (lack of overall use and/or strength) or overuse injuries (such as repetitive motions). Muscle strains, sports injuries, auto accidents, or other injuries can all result in pain from muscular irritation. This type of upper back pain is most amenable to manual treatments, such as:

- Regular moderate exercise, including stretching and strengthening exercises
- Chiropractic manipulation
- Massage therapy

## 2) Joint dysfunction causing upper back pain

The twelve vertebrae that make up the thoracic portion of the spine have two joints between each of them. As well, there are joints that connect twelve ribs to each side of the thoracic spine. Dysfunction in these joints can result in upper back pain.

Treatment for this type of injury usually includes spinal manipulation to help mobilize and restore the proper movement of the joint, resulting in a reduction of the discomfort and an increased ability for the joint to heal itself properly.

In summary, if you have upper back pain, don't simply suffer and "wait for it to go away". Seek conservative treatment and deal with the cause of the problem, not just the symptoms. Also, ask your chiropractor what you can change in your lifestyle (exercise, posture, etc) to do your part in preventing upper back pain.