

# Dr. Colin Gage

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

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## **Pain in the Spine?**

When it comes to problems in your neck or back, a common problem I see in my office is related to one or more of the small joints located between each of the vertebrae or bones of your spine. They are called "facet joints" and are located at the back of each vertebra. These joints, along with a disk and some strong ligaments, are what interlock two neighbouring vertebrae together. Due to the fact that the facet joints between each vertebra allow one vertebra to move relative to the one next to it, the overall spine can actually be quite flexible.

The facet joints have many nerve endings in them and are therefore highly sensitive to pain. When these joints are injured traumatically (as in a car accident), or even mildly stressed for extended periods of time (as in poor posture or repetitive lifting), they can become very stiff and acutely painful. When this happens, they need to be "adjusted" so that their motion is restored. A chiropractor is trained to do this safely and correctly. Muscle relaxant and painkiller prescription medication may give you some relief temporarily but they will not restore the motion to the affected joints, making you vulnerable to the problem reoccurring in the future.

Once the facet joints have been adjusted, the pain often begins to subside immediately. However, the inflammation within the joint and the surrounding connective tissue may take several weeks to settle down. During this time, you should be receiving regular chiropractic adjustments in order to maintain the mobility within the joint as it heals completely and naturally. It is important to remember that it is your body that does the healing and this takes time. The job of the chiropractor is only to help this process along.

If you have a region of your spine that seems to become easily aggravated whenever you challenge your body, it is likely that the joints and muscles in this region of your spine do not have the mobility that they should. The inflammation and pain may subside after days to weeks after each exacerbation of pain, but the lack of mobility remains. Thus, this area is prone to flare up again and again. By seeing your chiropractor, you can address the actual "cause" of the pain (the lack of mobility) and not just the temporary "symptoms" (the pain and inflammation).