

## **Information for Consent to Chiropractic Care at Back-in-Action: Joint Adjustments, Soft Tissue Therapy and Lifestyle Advice**

### **What Kind of Problems Might Occur With Chiropractic Care and What Should You Do If You Have An Issue?**

At Back-in-Action we really care about helping you make a rapid, safe and effective recovery. With our professional approach, the vast majority of people visiting us quickly improve and much appreciate the service we offer. However sometimes things don't go as well as either would like. We'd like to maintain a good working relationship with you even if there are difficult moments. If you do have a problem after a treatment, at any stage of your care, please let us know by contacting the clinic or your chiropractor.

Your safety as a patient is a core value which is emphasised throughout the chiropractic profession - during undergraduate and post graduate training, by our national associations, professional regulators, within clinics such as Back-in-Action and by each individual chiropractor. Chiropractors have a high level of training which includes diagnostic skills allowing them to be a First Contact Practitioner. We are trained to be alert to problems you may have that mean we need to adapt and use more gentle treatments or refer you to your GP when necessary for further medical investigations.

Generally, chiropractic care is very safe and effective. In fact, most side effects are positive effects—such as improved energy, greater vitality, better sleep and some patients even observe secondary health issues improving as well. However, as with all forms of treatment, there can sometimes be problems. Before we can start treating you, we need to let you know about some of the potential risks associated and how they should be handled, so you can give your informed consent, if you want us to continue with your care.

***Please read this information carefully before your first consultation. This sheet is for you. We will need you to sign a separate form stating you are aware of this information, before we can start treating you.***

We'll talk you through your treatment beforehand so that you understand the potential risks as well as benefits specific to your needs before you agree to treatment. Please feel free to ask us about any of the issues discussed on this sheet, if you have any concerns. Before deciding on the type of treatment to best help you, it's really important that you've told us about all your past medical problems and injuries.

**Treatment Style:** Though a very safe and effective treatment when performed by a skilled health professional like a chiropractor, about 1 person in 10 may feel a bit worse for a short while after their first treatment, if stronger manipulative therapies are used. This may include a temporary increase in the original symptoms or local soreness in the area treated. These usually disappear within a few hours or a few days at most. More rarely, some patients experience muscle and ligament sprain or strains. Both these problems can usually be easily relieved with appropriate use of ice or heat for a few days.

Chiropractors offer a range of effective and safe treatments both gentle and strong, to suit people of all ages and conditions. If you have a problem or concerns with a particular type of treatment it's important that you tell us, so we can change to a style which might help you more. Many people feel significant immediate relief from chiropractic treatment; though initially the duration of benefit may vary from a few minutes to a few days.

**Fracture:** With age in general or with certain medical conditions, a stronger type of manipulation, if applied to a very fragile osteoporotic bone such as a rib, could potentially result in a fracture. Again, we have a range of gentle and effective treatments suitable for all ages and conditions. Please tell us if you are aware of having any bone density issues or health problems that may impact the strength of your bones. Generally, we will probably want to use more gentle treatments with you as your body gets older.

**Severe Pain:** If you are very sore after a treatment, we would recommend you contact the clinic urgently for an appointment. This is an unusual response to chiropractic care and frequently implies either some kind of systemic inflammation, reactive compensation by the body in response to a deeper underlying issue, hyper-sensitised nervous system, hypoxia (low oxygen) or unrecognised medical condition. Whilst it is possible you may require urgent medical attention (see **Disk Problems/ Neck Manipulation/ Fracture**), for most people experiencing a severe response, we have the knowledge and experience to guide you through to recovery (see **Not Improving**). Whilst we do our best to anticipate such reactions, because your body's ability to compensate, they are not always obvious to predict. So, helping you recover from one problem can occasionally open up a 'Pandora's box' of underlying issues. Again, if you have problems, please contact the clinic to book an urgent appointment or return call and ask for advice.

**Disk Problems:** Lumbar disc problems can be very painful and worrying but are quite common and usually respond well to conservative chiropractic care. As a disc wears, the inner core can bulge or herniate into the spinal canal. The increased pressure on the area can affect the nerves that go down your leg causing combinations of back, buttock and leg pain. Sometimes weakness, numbness or pins and needles occur in the leg or foot. Symptoms in the leg are sometimes called sciatica or a trapped nerve.

For most people with disk problems, a course of treatment with a skilled chiropractor helps dramatically improve the problems and often helps avoid the risks associated with surgery but it can take some weeks to improve the symptoms. It may take several months to fully recover. Prognosis and recovery is usually good as long as you are sensible and carefully follow advice about your posture, lifting and bending, using ice and staying hydrated.

Spinal manipulation for lumbar disk herniation is very safe, especially when compared with other common treatments such as NSAIDS and surgery. The risk of spinal manipulation worsening an existing disk herniation is 1 in 3.7 million manipulations, which is very low. Your chiropractor is of course trying to help improve your condition and will choose treatments that they believe are in your best interest and will modify their approach if you feel it is not suiting you. Gentler manipulation within your pain tolerance initially are often the best approach.

It is possible, that in the rare case of a very severe unstable disk problem, chiropractic care may not be able to halt the progressive deterioration and the problem worsens. If your disc problems are not settling, your chiropractor may suggest an MRI scan to confirm the nature of the injury. Some persistent or severe cases of disc herniation may require surgery.

In very rare cases, the disc material in the spine can prolapse and compress nerves that supply the pelvic organs and legs. This is known as **Cauda Equina Syndrome** and is regarded as a medical emergency. Immediate advice should be sought from your chiropractor or if unavailable the A & E department of your local hospital. Symptoms of Cauda Equina Syndrome include: severe low back pain with sciatica down one or both legs, bladder dysfunction (a feeling of not fully emptying your bladder or becoming incontinent of urine), bowel dysfunction (not being able to retain faeces or a change in bowel function), numbness or altered sensation in the buttocks or between the legs, progressive weakness in the legs and/or feet and changes in sexual function with reduced sensation. Rapid assessment is vital to optimise recovery. Surgical intervention is very likely.

**Safety of Neck Manipulation:** Despite the occasional negative press, manipulation of the neck by a skilled health care professional, such as a chiropractor, is very safe. To rule out potential adverse events, we ask you many essential questions and complete an important set of safety checks before your first treatment. Some patients may however experience side-effects following treatment. These may include a temporary increase in the original symptoms, local soreness in the area treated, headache or transient lightheadedness. These usually disappear within a few hours or a few days at most.

More seriously, there is an extremely rare disorder, probably genetic in origin, where the arteries in the neck are fragile. There are also other conditions where the arteries in the neck may not be functioning

correctly. Such people may damage these arteries with common, every day neck movements (by turning their head, reversing the car, washing their hair etc.), which in the worst case may lead to a stroke, which could result in serious neurological injury and/or physical impairment. As part of your treatment programme, we may need to improve the way your neck moves. Though there have also been reported cases of stroke associated with neck manipulation, it has been demonstrated that even the strongest chiropractic manipulations do not place any more force on the arteries in your neck than would occur in normal everyday movements of the neck. Statistically the risk of occurrence of this problem is very rare, somewhere from 1 in 500,000 (0.0005%) to 1 in 8,000,000 (0.00000125%) of people – average one in a million (0.0001%). No cause and effect has been established between neck manipulation and stroke, and a similar association is also observed among patients seeing their GP.

If you have certain underlying health conditions, you may be at an increased risk of stroke so it is important to tell your chiropractor about your complete health and medication history. Sometimes neck pain and headaches can be symptoms of a **stroke** but this is very rare. If you are having any other unusual symptoms such as problems with vision, swallowing, speaking, walking, dizziness, fainting, nausea or numbness then please tell your chiropractor straight away, or if unavailable seek advice from the A & E Department of your local hospital.

In general, for most people, the benefits of neck manipulation far out way the risks. Skilled improvement of neck function is often crucial for helping bring relief to people with neck pain, headaches, some balance problems and many other conditions.

**Chiropractic Soft Tissue Treatments:** To help you get better, your chiropractic treatment may also involve work on your muscles, fascia ('cling film' stuff that wraps around your bones and muscles), nerves and organs. If these are tight and the sensory feedback from them is causing problems, then techniques to release them will eventually help you feel better.

If you have a medical condition or are on medications affecting these soft tissues, or they are sensitive because they are inflamed or damaged for some reason, then the working on them may injure the area or aggravate your condition, increasing inflammation. Please tell us if you'd rather us not treat you in some areas. If you are happy for us to proceed but are very tender during treatment or bruise easily, please let us know so we can modify the technique. Generally, most of these techniques are safe providing we are aware of problems.

Theoretically the techniques could damage the blood vessels and soft tissues if those areas are particularly fragile. Sometimes there may be bruising or irritation to the skin, that may last a week or 2. With visceral (internal organ) work to the intestine, there is a theoretical increased risk of infection of the blood (septicaemia) – as pressure on the organ might allow bacteria to enter the blood stream. Sometimes there may be a reaction to treatment with these techniques as like any treatment they can potentially open a 'Pandora's Box' of issues underlying the problem (see **Not Improving**).

**Experiencing Pain Between Visits But Not Immediately After?** Unless the pain is sore immediately or soon after treatment, it is probable that you have (inadvertently) managed to strain it yourself. Please be careful – especially after treatments or if you've had a recent flare up - with your posture and movement whilst lifting, bending, sitting, head hanging forwards etc. as these can stress the injured area. Sprains and strains can be easily re-injured within the first fortnight. It's important to stay active but for recent injuries it's also wise to listen to your body: avoid pain and prolonged activities.

When an area has been stiff, the muscles rapidly weaken around that area (at up to 4% a day). The treatment restores the movement and switches the muscles back on, but it takes a while (months) for your body to really build up strength again. Please be careful especially with lifting and bending in the first few months – it is important that you don't mistake feeling better for being fully fixed.

**Worse after Exercises or Problems Following Applying Advice:** As part of your treatment programme, we may introduce various exercises, postural advice and nutritional recommendations to try and help you recover. Please refrain from applying the advice if it proves to really aggravate your condition. Usually, we suggest for example with the exercises to first try doing them more gently (small, slower movement or less repetitions) and to work at about fifty percent of your maximum pain free capacity and to see if that helps.

**Not Improving:** If you're showing no signs of improvement within 8 visits, we may recommend you see your GP for medical investigations or recommend you for diagnostic imaging. For example, sometimes people have abnormally shaped bones, or there may be changes in bone or soft tissue shape which are compromising nerves or blood vessels. It is also possible that you may have an unrecognised medical condition. We are trained to be alert to signs of these and refer you to your GP. We can discuss with you whether to write you a letter to your GP would be helpful. Obviously, we depend on your complete disclosure of your full medical history to perform our job completely. Once medically treatable problems are ruled out, then a second course of chiropractic treatment may be appropriate.

Sometimes individuals have underlying problems (old injuries etc.) which can cause a severe reactive compensation. As we help restore normal function to one system, a deeper underlying problem can emerge, causing unwanted symptoms (opening a Pandora's Box!). These often resolve with the appropriate intervention such as using dietary change in case of systemic inflammation due to food intolerance; stabilisation belts for areas of joint instability; foot orthotics, heels lifts or sitting ergonomic devices for structural asymmetries. Exercises may be applied to help restore normal neurological function.

Whilst chiropractic care offers a fairly complete system of care, some underlying problems may be best approached with a co-management strategy. Depending on the nature of your problem you may benefit from seeing someone else with professional expertise: an acupuncturist, Alexander teacher, Bowen therapist, CranioSacral therapist, homeopath, hypnotherapist, massage therapist, podiatrist or rehabilitation therapist. Some people may find benefit from physiotherapy or osteopathy. Occasionally an underlying cranio-dental issue may benefit from orthodontic referral it is preventing your system from reaching a healthy adaptive state.

**Irregular or Incomplete Treatment Programme:** Most people seeing a chiropractor benefit most from regular treatment initially. Some individuals come in once or twice, feel better for a while and think their chiropractic hasn't worked when their condition returns. Whilst it's your choice how often you come in, we're more likely to help you get better results if you follow through with regular course of treatment. This is usually twice a week for 1-3 weeks whilst you get less than 4-5 days relief from your treatment or your pain levels are 5 or more out of 10. People with very severe pain problems (8+/10 pain) may benefit most from 3 treatments a week for 1-3 weeks. Once you are feeling good for 5 days or more and your pain levels are 4/10 or less then treatment frequency can drop to weekly, as you improve further, they can spread to fortnightly, then monthly. Most people need 4-8 treatments in the first 6 weeks to recover from an acute problem or flare up. A lot of people find 3-4 chiropractic follow-up visits a year is good for them.

**Summary:** Treatments provided by Back-in-Action, including spinal adjustment, manipulation and/or mobilisation; have been the subject of much research, conducted over many years and have been demonstrated to be appropriate and effective treatments for many common forms of spinal pain, pain in the shoulders/arms/legs, headaches and other similar symptoms. The aim of treatment provided at Back-in-Action is to contribute to your overall well-being. The risk of injury or complication from manual treatment is substantially lower than the risk associated with many medications and other treatment options often offered for such conditions. Your chiropractor will talk you through the treatment beforehand so that you further understand the potential risks as well as benefits before agreeing to treatment. Please keep us up to date on any new injuries, accidents or changes in your medical history. If you have any further questions, please speak to your chiropractor. **If you are happy to proceed with treatment please sign the consent form on your questionnaire.**