

## Is There A “Normal” In Health Care

We all are unique and different in our own way but when it comes to health we want to be something called “normal”. Times of illness, pain, or physical distress tell us that our body is not normal. We therefore seek help at these times. But how does our health care system actually address and define normal?

For doctors in general practice the top three symptoms they have to deal with are headaches, low back pain, and upper respiratory tract infections (colds). For colds we can take a swab of the throat, grow a culture and identify objectively that a staph infection is occurring. Objective methods are used to select an appropriate treatment. But what about for headaches and back pain? The three most advanced medical tools, X-rays, CAT scans (a type of x-ray machine), and M.R.I.'s., often give limited information on why you're hurting. Treatment becomes focused on reducing pain because the tests don't provide much guidance. Pain killers, muscle relaxants, and anti-inflammatories help reduce the pain but now your normal becomes defined as “the absence of pain”. This definition is incomplete because it is driven by symptoms and not by physical causes. Consider that right now about 30% of the population is experiencing low back pain alone, not including neck pain and headaches. That means in the Edmonton region alone over 300,000 people are hurting as you read this article. Wow! And what's even more surprising is that for many of these people any kind of normal may never be reached.

Try and imagine what would happen if you broke your wrist and didn't straighten it. If normal were simply the absence of pain then once the crooked wrist healed you could deceive yourself into thinking that it is just fine. Let a few years pass though and the effects of the crooked wrist start to show. Pain now occurs when trying to lift something heavy. The wrist bothers you when you hold your ski poles all day and you find yourself waking with stiffness more as the years pass. The irreversible effects of the uncorrected wrist finally catch up to you and osteoarthritis sets in. It's now way too late to do anything corrective and you have no choice but to manage the pain without ever getting to the root of the problem.

Think about what it's like to sprain an ankle and how long it can take to heal. Then consider that often ankles heal no more than 70%. Some instability remains so that one day you might step the wrong way on a curb and down you go. We convince ourselves that the supposedly “healed” ankle is normal because of the absence of pain or symptoms. But under the surface a demon awaits, the joint is unstable. Switching our attention to the spine we see a similar scenario. The spine is made of bones (vertebrae) which are connected with ligaments and muscles, similar to an ankle. Imagine that after hurting your neck in a bad fall, pain occurs. After a period of rest, some medications, and regular exercises you may feel great and life appears to return to normal. Be careful though because the day may arrive when you bend over to brush your teeth and can't stand up straight. Your neck and back are “killing” you for no known reason. Your medical doctor orders the appropriate tests (X-rays, C.A.T. scan, M.R.I., or other) but nothing much is revealed. The story repeats itself as before but this time the medications don't work as

well, exercises only aggravate your pain, and you become distressed. You wonder if there is anything measurably wrong or if it's just "all in your head".

Chiropractic care has advanced to a level that the public needs to know about. National Upper Cervical Chiropractic Association (NUCCA) trained doctors can now actually measure the spine in ways unheard of only a few years ago. Using specialized x-rays, the control center for your spine can be examined very closely. We now know that this control center is at the top of your neck where the "Atlas" bone is. In fact, we see that the position of the Atlas actually controls the alignment of your whole spine. Chiropractors can now accurately measure posture and Atlas alignment to compare it to an acceptable standard. This is incredible stuff! No longer do we have to struggle with multiple therapies to try and improve posture, balance weight distribution, and remove the mechanical stresses in the spine that cause pain. Back pain, neck pain, and headaches can now be examined from a mechanical or engineering perspective. The beauty of this technology is that it uncovers the structural cause of postural breakdown and gives the direction treatment must go in to help the patient. Normal now becomes a target. The posture and spine must be aligned to cause the hips and shoulders to level with the ground, straighten the head with the neck, and place the Atlas in its proper position. You may even find it surprising that for the average patient this target is usually reached in one month.

Traditionally neck and back conditions are medicated to provide symptom and pain relief. But if the posture is not aligned you can't straighten it with a pill. You have to x-ray it, measure it, mechanically treat it, then confirm that it's straightening with x-ray evaluation after the first treatment. The problem is that a large number of physicians haven't had a chance to learn what Chiropractors know. General practitioners are gaining an awareness of the link between the Atlas bone, posture, and pain. Chiropractors are well equipped to solve the mechanical problems of many people suffering from head, neck, and low back pain.

When dealing with problems with the neck and back, tests historically have been performed to rule out the presence of something bad such as fractures and tumors. Now we can apply Chiropractic technology to rule in the presence of alignment and whether it is normal or not. Just remember one thing. The importance of the Atlas bone and how it controls the whole spine (neck and back) must never be overlooked when trying to find out what is causing your head, neck or back pain.

Dr. Kevin Creswell DC BSC  
2316 - 96 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T6N 1J8  
email: [drcreswell@hotmail.com](mailto:drcreswell@hotmail.com)  
phone: (780) 450-1041