



Chiropractic Glossary

Anatomy

Articulation: A joint formed where two or more bones in the body meet. Your foot bone, for example, forms an articulation with your leg bone. You call that articulation an ankle.

Atlas: Another name for the first cervical vertebra, which is located at the top of your spine and supports your head. Misalignment of the atlas can place stress on your neuromusculoskeletal system.

Axis: Another name for the second cervical vertebra, which is located in your neck. This is an important joint that contributes significantly to your neck's range of motion.

Biomechanics: The body's mechanics, such as how muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments work to produce movement.

Coccyx: Commonly called the tailbone, the coccyx is composed of four separate but fused vertebrae that make up the bottom of your spine.

Cervical spine: The area of your spine containing the seven vertebrae that compose the neck.

Joint: A meeting point of two or more bones in your body that functions like a door hinge. Joints, like hinges, sometimes get stuck, or subluxated. Your chiropractor can adjust them to help improve your health.

Kyphosis: Refers to the shape of your mid-back and sacral regions of your spine, which are shaped like a backward letter C.

Ligament: Tissue that bonds bone to bone. Ligaments are strong and provide excellent support, which is especially important in joints like your ankle.

Lordosis: Refers to the shape of the cervical and lumbar regions of your spine, which are shaped like the letter C. You aren't born with this curve, but develop it as an infant when you start to sit, crawl and stand.

Lumbar: The area of your spine containing the five vertebrae that compose the lower back.

Muscle: Contractile tissue that allows body parts to move. While most people don't realize it, muscles are considered bodily organs.

Muscle tone: A slight, continuous contraction of muscle fibers that is necessary to maintain posture, keep muscles healthy and squeeze blood in your veins back to your heart. Without muscle tone, your muscles would get weak and be susceptible to injury.

Neuromusculoskeletal system: A broad term referring to the neurological system, including the brain, spinal cord and nerves, the muscle system, which includes muscles, ligaments, tendons and connective tissues, and the skeletal system, which includes bones of the skull, spine and limbs.

Sacroiliac joint: The joint between the sacrum and the ilium, which is a flat bone that helps compose your pelvis. You have two sacroiliac joints, which allow for proper pelvic movement. When they get irritated or inflamed it causes significant pain.

Sacrum: A triangular-shaped bone between your pelvic bones that is the foundation for your spine. The sacrum helps transfer weight, allows for small pelvic movements and meets with the pelvic bones to form the sacroiliac joints.

Soft tissue: Non-bony tissue, like muscles, disks, tendons and ligaments.

Spine: Your spine supports your body and protects the delicate spinal cord and nerves. It comprises 33 vertebrae, grouped into different categories based on location and anatomy. These locations are the cervical, thoracic, lumbar, sacral and coccygeal regions.

Tender point: One of several pea-size, focal and hypersensitive sites found most commonly in muscle and connective tissue that, unlike a trigger point, doesn't cause pain in other regions when stimulated.

Tendon: An extension of muscle that functions as an attachment between muscle and bone. Tendons are extremely strong, but not very capable of contracting.

Thoracic: The area of your spine containing the 12 vertebrae that compose the upper back.

Trigger point: One of several pea-size, focal and hypersensitive sites found most commonly in muscle and connective tissue that, when stimulated, can cause pain in a specific region. A stimulated trigger point in the back of your neck, for example, can cause a dull pain that radiates to the area around your eyes.

Vertebrae: Bony segments that form your spinal column. Humans normally have 33 of these stacked on top of each other. There are seven in your neck, 12 in your mid back, five in your low back, five in your sacrum and four in your tailbone.

Conditions

Acute: Symptoms or conditions that have developed recently, which are usually sharp or severe.

Chronic: Symptoms or conditions that have persisted for weeks, months or even years, which can range from mild to severe.

Degeneration: A breaking down of bodily tissue, such as that in the spine. Poor spinal mechanics, trauma and aging can cause a thinning or degeneration of spinal disks, the same way driving a car wears out tires.

Health: To chiropractors, health isn't just an absence of disease, but a state of positive mental, physical and spiritual functioning.

Misalignment: Improperly aligned joints in the body. These are usually associated with subluxations, and can stress your neuromusculoskeletal system.

Spasm: Involuntary shortening of muscle fiber. Spasm often occurs after an injury, but many things can cause it. During spasm, muscles cannot be relaxed and the associated joints have a decreased range of motion.

Strain: An injury to muscles or ligaments caused by overstretching, overuse, tearing, tension or torsion. Poor posture can also strain these tissues, as it places increased demands on them.

Subluxation: An area in the spine that moves improperly. It occurs when spinal bones become misaligned or lose their normal range of motion. A subluxation can stress the entire nervous system.

Vertebral subluxation complex: A number of conditions associated with a subluxation that includes abnormal joint motion, abnormal nerve expression, abnormal muscle function, abnormal soft tissue and abnormal function of internal organs and systems.

Whiplash: An injury that occurs when the head is suddenly accelerated and decelerated, in a whip-like motion, forward to backward or side to side. While many people associate whiplash with motor vehicle accidents, the injury can also occur during sports or falls.

Exercise

Active exercise: An exercise performed without assistance. A sit-up, for example, is an active exercise.

Passive exercise: An exercise performed with assistance, usually from a therapist, that requires the exerciser to exert little physical energy. Passive exercises are important during the acute, or early, phase of recovery from an injury.

Resisted exercise: An exercise performed against resistance. All weight-training exercises, for example, are resisted exercises.

Bodily Movements

Extension: Movement of two body parts away from each other, such as when you look up and move your chin away from your chest.

Flexion: Movement of two body parts toward each other, such as when you flex your bicep and move your hand and wrist to your shoulder.

Pronation: Inward or medial movement of a body part. If one arm is stretched out palm up, for example, and then rotated so that the palm is facing down, the movement is called pronation.

Range of motion: The arc through which a joint or joints can move. Chiropractors often use the term when discussing dysfunctional joints. A normal neck, for example, can move about 70 to 90 degrees to the right. Chiropractors would say a neck that only rotated 50 degrees had a restricted range of motion.

Supination: Outward or lateral movement of a body part. If one arm is stretched out palm down, for example, and then rotated so that the palm is facing up, the movement is called supination.

Chiropractic Care

Acute care: Treatment directed at relieving painful symptoms, which have usually developed recently. **Activator tool:** Also known as an activator adjusting instrument, the T-shaped, handheld activator tool allows chiropractors to give precise, low-force and high-speed adjustments.

Adjustment: The application of thrust to a joint in the body, using a specific speed, depth and force. Chiropractors deliver this adjustment by hand or with a small handheld device called an activator tool. Adjustments are the primary method of removing joint misalignments or subluxations.

Maintenance or preventive care: Chiropractic care that focuses on maintaining patients' optimal health. This includes regular chiropractic checkups, which allow chiropractors to detect and correct subluxations or spinal misalignments.

Manual treatment: Treatment by hand, which may consist of adjustments, mobilizations, traction, massage and other techniques, all aimed at influencing the spine and its related components.

Mobilization: A form of physical therapy in which chiropractors apply gentle, often repetitive movements to stuck joints in the body without the use of thrust.

Palpation: Examination by touch. Palpation is one of several methods chiropractors use to assess tissue beneath the skin, like muscle, ligament, tendon, bone and fat. Using their hands, chiropractors can palpate tissue to determine its size, consistency, mobility and general health.

Soft tissue therapy: Therapy directed at the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the body. This therapy can include massage, which your chiropractor or a massage therapist can administer. Massage helps to relax tight muscles, increase circulation and promote healing.

Thrust: A force applied during a chiropractic adjustment.

Types of Health Care

Allopathic medicine: A method of treatment that focuses on producing effects that are the opposite of those associated with an illness. If someone had an illness that caused dry skin, for example, allopathic doctors would prescribe moisturizing remedies. The word comes from combining the Greek *allos*, meaning other, and *patheia*, meaning suffering.

Chiropractic: Chiropractic is a health-care profession based on diagnosing, treating and preventing neuromusculoskeletal disorders, and a health-care philosophy centered on the effects those disorders and other lifestyle factors have on a patient's nervous system and overall health.

The word chiropractic means to practice with the hands, as it comes from combining the Greek words cheir, meaning hand, and praktikos, meaning practical or operative. The term refers to chiropractors' hands-on techniques, especially adjustments, which some call manipulations or spinal manipulative therapy. But it could also refer to chiropractors' guiding hands, as they help patients adopt lifestyle habits that promote health and wellbeing.

Holistic medicine: A method of treatment that focuses on the entire person and his or her environment, rather than partitioned illnesses or body parts.

