

Your Lifeline: Your Spine.  
By Dr. Robert Mirandola

October is spinal health awareness month and thus our article today will be devoted to what spinal health truly means and common misconceptions that new patients come to our office with regularly. Let us begin with an understanding of what it means to have a healthy spine and why it is so vital to your health and wellbeing to maintain one.

Structurally, your spine is a stacking of 24 individually moving vertebrae with thick spacers sandwiched between these bones called discs. When viewed from the side, a healthy spine should have three flowing curvatures to allow your spine to act like a spring and from the back, a healthy spine should be completely linear (see adjacent illustration).

If you were asked what is the most important organ in your body, some might say your heart, others may say your liver, and still others may even say your lungs. If you are like most, you may be surprised to learn that the most vital and delicate organ in your body is your brain. **Your brain and spinal cord are the very first organs to develop in-utero and control your existence including your overall health and the health of every organ in your body.** To put this in perspective, one can live without food for several weeks, without water for several days, without air for several minutes, and without proper nerve supply through your body... not even a fraction of a second. So here it is: Your brain and spinal cord together are your lifeline. Period. Because these are the most vital of all organs in your body, they are the only organs completely encased in bone. If your skull protects your brain, then the suite of armor surrounding your spinal cord is your spine column.

Although this system of protection is flawless, we as humans are not. Through living, we subject our spines to many various traumas such as car accidents, sports injuries, and slips/falls. More commonly though, we subject our spines to minor repetitive stresses such as driving to work hunched over the staring wheel, then sitting hunched over a workstation for 6-8 hours a day, then assuming the same posture while driving home in traffic, then hunched over at the dinner table, then hunched over again to watch television. We do this day in and day out for years and we wake up one day or bend over to tie our shoes and suddenly, we have low back pain or neck pain. After many weeks of hoping it will go away, we go to our doctor so that he/she can take an x-ray and tell us that we have arthritis in our spine but that: A) we all have arthritis in our spine due to aging or B) our arthritis is due to our genes.

This is the first myth. **Spinal arthritis (osteoarthritis) is not due to aging and is absolutely not due to genes.** Rather, because of these past traumas or abnormal stresses to our spines, our vertebrae or pelvis easily become misaligned. If these misalignments persist, without correction, your spine becomes unstable and your body will lay down additional bone to stabilize this misaligned joint. This additional bone is called bone spurring and is the hallmark of what doctors call arthritis. There is no bad luck involved in this process, no effects of aging, and no genes at work. Rather, as stated above, it is an

effect of past spinal injury that never got corrected, poor posture for many years, and bad spinal hygiene.

The second myth we will address today is that disc herniation spontaneously happens or is result of bad luck. **Disc herniation is only the direct result of the process described above, namely past spinal injury that has gone uncorrected.** To use a metaphor: picture a jelly donut from our favorite donut chain here in Boston in your hand. What do you suspect will occur when you squash one end of that donut with your other hand? The jelly spurts out the other side correct? The same thing occurs when one herniates a spinal disc. Abnormal pressure is placed on your disc from past spinal injury and in time, you can experience a herniation.

The direct result of both of these two conditions described above is direct pressure on your spinal nerves or pressure on your spinal cord itself and can result in pain, sciatica, and a multitude of other health issues (please revisit the significance of your spinal cord on your general health as stated above).

Because a properly working nervous system is vital to your health, it is critical that you maintain a healthy spine by getting examined by a chiropractor for nerve interference. Specific and light chiropractic adjustments are the only way to be certain that your nervous system will be free of interference by the results of spinal misalignments described above.

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