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What is Chiropractic?

Chiropractors believe that the correct functioning of the nervous system is paramount for a healthy body. Chiropractic is concerned with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of biomechanical disorders of the musculoskeletal system and the effects of these disorders on physical and general health. Chiropractic treatment is a method of releasing restrictions within the joints whilst considering asymmetries within the skeletal alignment so that the nervous system can work as efficiently as possible, resulting in an increased mobility and range of motion of the joints and providing relief from pain and discomfort.

Chiropractors use manual techniques to manipulate specific joints and muscles that may be causing back, neck, pelvic and musculoskeletal problems. There are a number of different chiropractic techniques that are practiced universally; Waterside Chiropractic predominantly offers the McTimoney Chiropractic technique integrated with soft tissue release (STR) for human patients and this approach is integrated further with the International Academy of Veterinary Chiropractic (IAVC) technique for animal patients. These techniques are recognised for being relatively gentle, precise, whole body approaches to chiropractic care for both humans and animals.

Chiropractic and the skeletal anatomy

The spine is made up of individual bones called vertebrae. The spinal cord passes through the vertebrae and passes messages from the brain down the spinal cord to the numerous branches of nerves which emerge from between each individual bone. These nerves activate either the skin, a particular organ, or other body tissues such as muscles. The message from the brain may tell the muscle to contract or relax to generate body movement, or it may ask the body to carry out a process, for example, digestion or repair. Messages are then passed back through the nerves to the brain to tell the brain what has been done and what the outcome was.

How does chiropractic treatment work?

The body functions best when all of the bones and joints are in symmetry with their neighbouring bones and these bones/joints do not have a restriction in their range of motion, i.e. the body is straight and fully mobile. There is a level of tolerance within which the body continues to function, but it is likely that if it is functioning within the tolerance levels that it will have to compensate to a degree through some muscles working slightly harder and other muscles not working quite so hard. Muscles work in pairs antagonistically, that is as one contracts and flexes the joint, the other will lengthen. If they are not working evenly with each other, then this can lead to some muscles becoming tight and going into spasm. This can create more strain and may lead to pain and stiffness each side of the joint.

When the body is poorly aligned and is working beyond the tolerance levels, nerves and surrounding tissues can become pinched and cause pain and discomfort – in humans this may feel like pins and needles, tingling or even numbness of a body area. This can impair the ability of the nerves to send messages back and forth between the brain, muscles and organs, or result in distorted messages which can then result in muscle wasting or disease. It is vital that the messages are clear between the various body parts and the brain so as to keep the body in a healthy state where it functions optimally.

The chiropractor looks for areas within the bones and joints that are not moving as freely as they should and may be impairing the messages from the brain to the rest of the body and releases these restrictions enabling the body to realign itself so that the nerves can then function at their optimal level. Muscles, tendons and ligaments hold the skeleton together providing stability and mobility so they are greatly affected by restrictions and poor alignment and can also benefit greatly from treatment.

What causes poor skeletal alignment and how does this affect the body?

Anyone with back, neck, pelvic and musculoskeletal problems may be able to benefit from chiropractic treatment. In a large number of cases, chiropractors see humans and animals that have suffered injury due to a trauma such as an accident, fall or collision which can all result in the body becoming misaligned. However, it does not always take a direct trauma or an accident for pain to develop. Small but repetitive traumas can also result in misalignments and changes in physique or movement.

Some medical and veterinary conditions can also result in changes occurring within the body and specifically within the bones, joints or musculature, resulting in areas either becoming weaker or having to work harder to compensate for areas that are not working as well as they should, and these too can result in an onset of symptoms. Poor posture and behavioural habits can also be a cause of misalignment within the body and can be an explanation for levels of pain and discomfort, behavioural changes in animals, poor athletic performance, change in gait, stiffness or reduced muscle tone. Such misalignments could be corrected and result in positive changes to these symptoms and make the person or animal feel a lot more comfortable. (For additional information on causes and specific signs and symptoms to look out for in horses and dogs, please see leaflets “Chiropractic and Your Horse” and “Chiropractic and Your Dog”.)

How many treatments are needed?

It is important to follow a course of treatment and follow ups are a very important part of the process. It may have taken years for the body to get into the position that it currently is, so usually one treatment is not likely to get the body to realign first time. It will also depend on the type and extent of an injury or disease and how long the person or animal has had the condition as to how long the body will take to heal or change – we need to remember that healing is a process that can take time and true changes will continue following each treatment.

Once the patient has completed the initial course of treatment and is functioning at the most optimal level attainable for them, it is extremely beneficial to continue with maintenance by having treatment 2 or 3 times a year to keep everything in line. These can help prevent a reoccurrence of the original condition or a new condition from occurring and are highly recommended in all cases. Generally, this will then be all that is needed unless a new condition occurs or a situation happens where the patient has a fall or accident, when an additional treatment or two at that time can help to realign the body.



Common reactions to treatment

There are various normal reactions to treatment and although aftercare advice is tailored to meet the individual person or animal's specific needs, general advice that applies to all after treatment is to have a couple of days of quiet to allow the treatment to settle. The reason for quiet after treatment is because the body has to take on board the adjustments and changes and realign itself and its functions. For a couple of days the person or animal may feel sore, tired, stiff or achey whilst their body adapts to its new alignment before they will start to feel better. Equally, they may feel a lot better immediately and in some respects, this can be more difficult to manage as they may want to get on with all those chores that they have been putting off as they have not felt up to doing them, or in the case of animals, run and charge about because they feel so much better!

It is important to ensure that the patient is kept warm and that they drink plenty of water to help move any toxins in the body to the lymph system to be excreted. Exercise routines should normally be reduced initially building it back up over the first week or so until eased back into their old routine. If the chiropractor feels that there are some changes in routine or specific exercises required to improve and strengthen the musculature, bones and joints, then these will be discussed within the aftercare advice so that the chiropractor, patient, and in the case of an animal patient, the owner, can consider any changes to their normal routines or exercise sessions to implement these.

Can chiropractors work alongside my General Practitioner (GP) or Veterinary Surgeon?

Under current legislation, the General Chiropractic Council (GCC) is the statutory body that regulates the chiropractic treatment of humans in the UK and only those registered with the GCC may practice as chiropractors (www.gcc-uk.org). Chiropractors are able to work independently of GPs but will normally always consult with the patient's GP (with permission of the patient) where it is in the best interests of the patient, or will refer the patient back to their GP or on to another healthcare professional if that is in the patient's best interests.

The treatment of animals is regulated under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and chiropractors or others that practice disciplines that involve the treatment, manipulation or physical therapy of animals may only work with animals with the permission of a veterinary surgeon. This is to safeguard the health and welfare of animals and to protect owners and their animals from incompetent and unqualified practice. Most veterinary surgeons are aware of the benefits of chiropractic care for animals and will readily give their permission for animals in their care to receive chiropractic treatment.

What is McTimoney Chiropractic?

McTimoney Chiropractic is a gentle non-invasive holistic treatment which works to realign and balance the musculoskeletal system, restoring health, movement, soundness and performance through manipulation that releases restrictions within and realigns the joints, relieving muscle tension and associated discomfort. No anaesthetic or drugs are needed and comprehensive individualised after-care advice and support forms part of the package.

McTimoney Chiropractic was devised by John McTimoney in the 1950s. He used the technique initially to treat human patients and then adapted it to be able to treat animals. Animals, like humans, have a musculoskeletal structure that consists of bones, joints, ligaments and muscles, and like humans, they can suffer from similar types of skeletal disorders and muscular strains, e.g. back, neck, pelvic and joint pain.



The McTimoney Chiropractic technique can be used on humans and animals of all ages, from the very young to the elderly.

McTimoney Chiropractic is a whole body technique; that is the whole body is assessed and treated, not just the area of pain and discomfort. This is because the area that may be most affected by pain or discomfort may be as a result of a problem in another part of the body, i.e. it is compensating for another area. It is a treatment that is known for being relatively gentle and most humans and animals enjoy being treated and respond well to treatment. Chiropractic can help with freedom of movement by maintaining mobility and a good range of active and passive motion within the joint.

Both people and animals, particularly when they are in pain, can be very sensitive. McTimoney Chiropractors use just their hands to deliver quick, light adjustments which ensures minimum discomfort. It is the speed and precision of the adjustment rather than the force applied that helps to realign the body. The body is then in the best position to use its innate ability to heal itself.

What is Soft Tissue Release (STR)?

Soft Tissue Release (STR) is an advanced sports massage technique widely used in assessing and stretching soft tissues; muscles, fascia, tendons and ligaments. It is a dynamic, highly effective technique that has an immediate and powerful effect on muscle and connective tissue. STR is a combination of Myofascial Release, Therapeutic Massage and Active Assisted Stretching. STR involves repeatedly and quickly stretching small areas of the soft tissue. Precise pressure is applied to part of the muscle which is then moved to achieve a very specific stretch.

Muscles are made up of strands of muscle fibres which should lie neatly alternating with one another. Each muscle has attachment points where they attach to bones or other connective tissue. However, muscle fibres can become damaged, congested and tangled. This can distort attachment points and cause restrictions and pain.

Stretching is often used for easing the pain of muscle tension and realigning the body so that it functions in a more optimal way. However, unlike generalized stretching, soft tissue release targets specific areas of tension within a muscle. It is also useful for targeting muscles that are difficult to stretch actively and for isolating a muscle within a group of muscles that would normally stretch together.

STR involves the use of manual pressure on a muscle to create a temporary false attachment point and then taking the muscle into a pain-free stretch to untangle the muscle fibres. STR is used to increase range of movement, relieve pain, prevent, repair and manage injuries.

STR is an excellent way of treating tendonitis in a muscle as it takes pressure off its point of origin, which is where the inflammation occurs in this condition. It has also been proven to be useful in the treatment of certain conditions such as medial and lateral epicondylitis (Golfers and Tennis Elbow) and plantar fasciitis (Policemen's Foot/Heel) as it stimulates tissue repair in these conditions.

Benefits include:

- Realigning muscle fibres that have been stressed due to injury
- Breaking up of adhesions between muscles
- Restoring balance
- Aiding posture
- Mobilisation of joints



What is the International Academy of Veterinary Chiropractic technique (IAVC)?

The International Academy of Veterinary Chiropractic (IAVC) is affiliated with Options for Animals International, which offered a post-graduate program in animal chiropractic from 1986. Most of the work in animal chiropractic is extrapolated from the human chiropractic profession, both in technique and in functional theories to explain clinical results. The last decade has demonstrated tremendous potential benefits of animal chiropractic from applications in clinical practice. The International Academy of Veterinary Chiropractic technique is an emulation of the Gonstead and Diversified techniques.

Like McTimoney Chiropractic, Veterinary Chiropractic is a manual therapy, which looks for areas of restriction of movement and restores function of muscles and joints in the neck, back, pelvis and limbs to maintain optimum movement and soundness. It also focuses on the biomechanical dysfunction of the spine and its effects on the entire nervous system throughout the body.

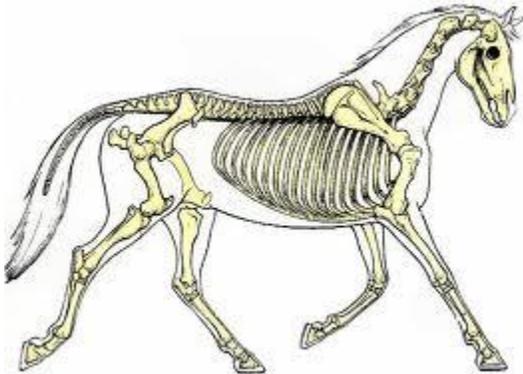
Veterinary Chiropractic treatment does not replace traditional veterinary medicine; however, it can provide additional means of diagnosis and treatment options for underlying problems or pathologies as well as treating biomechanical-related musculoskeletal disorders.

Veterinary chiropractic treatment can be used for:

- Chronic musculoskeletal problems
- Acute problems such as tension or stiffness
- Addressing compensations from underlying pathologies
- Prophylactic treatment to maintain fitness
- Maintenance of soundness in older animals
- Enhance performance ability in animals
- Treatment of chronic and acute pain syndromes
- Complementary treatment for chronic lameness

A healthy animal should move symmetrically and bend in all directions without tension. Even though animals have a muscle mass over the spine, the vertebral joints are flexible and relatively easy to manipulate with minimal force. An animal showing tension, pain, muscle imbalance or asymmetry, may possibly have restricted movement within a joint. When a chiropractor identifies restriction of movement within a joint, the aim is to restore mobility to the joint by means of a speedy, short thrust along the plane of the joint. This is called the chiropractic adjustment.

Chiropractic can help an animal to move more freely and symmetrically. By maintaining mobility and a good range of active and passive motion within the joint, wear and tear of the joint can be minimised and will promote long-term health. Hence treatment can be suitable for animals of all breeds and ages. Performance animals will normally need the most frequent treatment due to the stress on their body.



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