

What Is Canine Chiropractic Care?
Courtesy of AHVMA, PO Box 630, Abingdon MD 21009 410-569-0794

Canine chiropractic care is an alternative drugless method of health care. Humans have enjoyed the benefits of chiropractic care for more than 100 years. Many people see their chiropractor for more than just back pain. People visit their chiropractor for more energy, improved sports performance, better resistance to disease, and to help insure drug-free lives for themselves and their families. This is known as wellness care.

The dog's spinal column has over 100 separate joints. Each of these joints must function correctly for it to perform appropriately. The amount and direction of spinal movement is determined mostly by joint size and shape. When a dog loses its normal range of motion in one or more of these joints there must be compensation elsewhere. Limited back movement occurs in up and down motion, side to side motion, and rotation. The weakest areas of the dog's spine are the areas where the vertebra shape is changing (transition areas). These include the upper neck (skull and C1), the lower neck (C7 to T1), the middle of the back (T13 to L1) and the lumbosacral junction.

The Components of the Vertebral Subluxation Complex.

A subluxation means that the vertebrae and corresponding motor unit (surrounding soft tissue and other vertebrae) are not moving correctly. These subluxations are caused by one of three things; trauma, toxins and stress. The trauma could be a major traumatic incident or it could be a series of micro traumas that don't seem to matter at the time they occur. A gait abnormality due to a problem in one leg will cause stress in other joints in the body. Conformation and posture problems can lead to subluxations anywhere in the dog's spine. Age can lead to problems in the spine. The intervertebral disc undergoes degenerative changes as the cartilage ages. The ability of the nucleus to maintain water content and handle stress decreases, causing a decrease in the bio-mechanical function and increase in small tears and scar tissue adhesions. These can lead to problems with motion in the affected joint. Overweight animals will cause undue stress to the joints of the legs and spine as they move around. Early on some subluxations can exist without symptoms. However, left unattended they will eventually become symptomatic.

Kinesiopathology or the pathology of movement starts with the initial misalignment of the joint, which is made up of two or more separate bones. Each and every spinal segment contributes a small portion of the total amount of movement that allows the dog's back to move. When one segment is not moving correctly then the segments in front or behind may become hyper mobile in an attempt to maintain normal range of motion. Hyper mobility leads to degenerative changes and eventually loss of mobility of another segment. Kinesiopathology restricts the dog's ability to move in any or all ranges of motion.

Neuropathology is the result of kinesiopathology and result in problems in the nervous system. A nerve exits the spinal canal between two vertebra. If these vertebra are subluxated there may be pain, heat, swelling, muscle spasm and loss of motion in and around the area.

Myopathology includes the tightness and spasms that occur in the muscles supplied by the nerves exiting the vertebral canal between the subluxated vertebra. This tightness can be isolated to the small muscles that connect one vertebra to the next or it can extend to the long muscles that run along the entire length of the dog's back. This tightness can cause pain and weakness in the muscle and may lead to changes in the curve of the dog's spine.

Connective Tissue Pathology includes the changes that are seen in the tendons, ligaments, and supporting tissues in the area of the subluxation. Immobilization of these tissues leads to profound degenerative changes in as little as 3 days. Cartilage shrinks increasing its susceptibility to damage from minor trauma. Adhesions start to form which further decreases mobility in the area. Ligaments start to shorten leading to tightness in the area.

Inflammatory Response includes the swelling, heat, redness, altered function, and pain that are the body's response to inflammation that results from the subluxation. This is the most common reason that people seek out chiropractic care for themselves or their dogs. Nerves surrounding an inflamed area become hyperexcitable and they will continue to fire even after stimulus has been removed. The pain from a subluxation will vary depending on the severity and acuteness of the problem.

Chiropractic adjustments are specific HIGH Velocity LOW Force adjustments with a specific line of correction aimed at correcting joint misalignments and to restore proper skeletal movement and muscle/nerve function. The movement within these joints is minute and therefore the adjustments by the chiropractor will be specific and significant. Canine chiropractic adjustments are aimed to adjust one joint at a time and not the entire animal. Adjusting the joints in the dog's back does not require brute strength, mallets or two by fours. The AVCA certified doctor will use a high velocity thrust at the precise line of correction to reduce the dog's subluxations and restore normal nerve function.

The biggest con in canine chiropractic care is unqualified people tarnishing the reputation of qualified and knowledgeable canine chiropractors. The American Veterinary Chiropractic Association believes that neither chiropractors nor veterinarians are prepared to adjust animals when they get their degree. Veterinarians receive no training in the art, science and philosophy of chiropractic. Chiropractors receive no training in animal anatomy, physiology or pathology.

AVCA certified doctors have undergone an intensive post graduate course that requires a minimum of 200 hours of study and have passed a certification examination that is similar to the examinations that were required for them to get their state license. After their initial certification they must attend continuing education classes on a yearly basis to keep current on new and advanced techniques. They have been trained to recognize pathology that may cause chiropractic care to be contraindicated. In these cases they will work with the veterinarian in an attempt to help the dog return to health.

**For more information contact AVCA, 442154 E 140 Rd, Bluejacket, OK 74333 USA, Phone 918-784-2231
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