

Dear Chiropractor: Help Me Kick the Habit

Beating addiction may take an extra nudge from the chiropractor.

By: Katie Gilbert

When Jose Mehlman enrolled in the Exodus addiction treatment center as a study participant, he had hit bottom. Years before, he tried treatments that fell into his lap—anything that might help him. But they were "nowhere near effective." Today, Mehlman is living a viable, drug-free life. Why was his Exodus experience so successful? "I think that chiropractic care was an integral part of my recovery," he says.

But what does the spine have to do with addiction? The connection may be explained by the presence, or absence, of brain chemicals that make us feel good. When the spinal chord and its nerves are in proper order, chemicals known as neurotransmitters are released in a specific sequence, like falling dominoes. The result: A state of well-being. However, subluxations or misalignments of the spine can cause pressure and tension on surrounding tissue, interrupting this feel-good sequence.

Jay Holder, a chiropractor and physician with the Exodus Treatment Center in Miami Beach, wondered how patients would fare on a traditional rehab treatment program supplemented with chiropractic care. Some 98 subjects, including Mehlman, participated in the study, which was published in *Molecular Psychiatry*. Holder's research found that when an addiction treatment program was supplemented with frequent chiropractic adjustments over a 30-day period, the patients displayed an unprecedented 100 percent program completion rate. In addition, initially rampant depression and anxiety dropped significantly.

In comparison, the study's two other groups—one, a passive group who underwent only standard rehabilitation, and another, a placebo group who received sham chiropractic care—displayed significantly lower retention rates, and were about as likely to finish the program as the average recovering addict in the U.S. (a probability of about 55 percent).

Holder's study used a specific chiropractic technique called the Torque Release Technique, which focuses less on the alignment of the bones and more on what he calls the "neurophysiology of the spine." Certain types of subluxations can interfere with the tissue that extends from the brain stem through the spine and into the coccyx, hampering systems like the limbic system (known as the "seat of emotions") and throwing off neurotransmitters that keep us feeling our best. Holder's research suggests that drug treatment programs prove to be more successful with this type of chiropractic care.

Holder stresses that chiropractic manipulation doesn't represent a new form of treatment for addiction. Instead, it helps patients use existing treatment more thoroughly. If chiropractic care does become a mainstay in treatment programs, one thing's for sure: the phrase "straighten up" will take on a whole new meaning for addicts.

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