

## **Chiropractic Maintenance Care - What's New? A Systematic Review of the Literature**

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These authors performed a systematic review of the literature using the search terms "chiropractic OR manual therapy" AND "Maintenance Care OR prevention", using PubMed and Web of Science, starting from 2007. Fourteen identified studies were included in their review.

#### KEY POINTS FROM THIS ARTICLE:

- 1) "Maintenance Care is a traditional chiropractic approach, whereby patients continue treatment after optimum benefit is reached."
  - "Maintenance Care was defined as a secondary/tertiary preventive approach, recommended to patients with previous pain episodes, who respond well to chiropractic care."
- 2) "Maintenance Care is applied to approximately 30% of Scandinavian chiropractic patients."
  - "Both chiropractors and patients believe in the efficacy of Maintenance Care."
- 3) Results:
  - "Maintenance Care patients experienced fewer days with low back pain compared to patients invited to contact their chiropractor 'when needed'."
- 4) "There is reasonable consensus among chiropractors on what Maintenance Care is, how it should be used."
- 5) "Maintenance Care can be considered an evidence-based method to perform secondary or tertiary prevention in patients with previous episodes of low back pain, who report a good outcome from the initial treatments."
  - "These results should not be interpreted as an indication for Maintenance Care on all patients, who receive chiropractic treatment."
- 6) "Previously, low back pain (LBP) and neck pain (NP) were thought to be self-limiting ailments, hardly worthy of attention." Consequently, treatment, if any, was aimed at shortening the course of symptoms.
  - However, it is now accepted fact that "spinal pain is a recurring disorder."

- “The acute episode of spinal pain, similarly to an episode of asthma, may be short-lived, but the condition is often, as for asthma, life-long.”
- Because “spinal pain is a condition with exacerbations and remissions throughout life, it might be wise to shift the focus of treatment from cure of the condition to management of pain trajectories.”

7) The 14 articles reviewed presented these points pertaining to Maintenance Care:

- It is a “type of prolonged care delivered at regular intervals.”
- It is “described as a preventive approach, aimed at preventing new episodes and maintaining improvement, i.e. secondary and tertiary prevention.”
- “Patients stated that the purpose was to prevent recurrences (78%) and to remain pain-free (68%).”
- Most Maintenance Care visits were scheduled within a range of one to 3 months.
- “Maintenance Care sessions included a range of treatment modalities, from the ordinary examination/manual treatment to packages including exercise prescriptions, advice on ergonomics, diet, weight loss, and stress management, i.e. it included a program meant to motivate patients to maintain healthy lifestyle habits through empowerment.”
- Maintenance Care patients “treated in more areas of the spine and more often with a ‘full’ spine perspective compared to the non-Maintenance Care patients.”
- The strongest predictor for recommending Maintenance Care was if the patient had had previous episodes and had improved with treatment.
  - Other factors included “patient-related factors such as being worried, having a stressful life or a hard physical job.”
- The results for Maintenance Care “favored the group receiving manual treatment and long-term intense continued care.”
- “A significant difference with 13 days less with bothersome pain over 12 months was noted in the group randomized to follow-up sessions scheduled at regular intervals, compared to patients who were told to come back only when their symptoms recurred.”

8) “The majority of chiropractors (98%) stated that they believed that Maintenance Care could be used as a preventive tool, at least sometimes.”

- 9) "The mean proportion of patents seen on a Maintenance Care regimen was between 22–41%."
- 10) Maintenance Care use "was more common among experienced chiropractors, clinic owners, and those who received their chiropractic degree in the US (as opposed to colleagues trained in Europe)."
- 11) The usefulness of Maintenance Care was assessed in patients with recurring problems that improved well with initial treatments.
- 12) "Maintenance Care is mainly seen as a secondary or tertiary preventive approach."
- 13) "The application of Maintenance Care varies, from clinicians who never provide any Maintenance Care to those who suggest that all patients should be put on a Maintenance Care scheme."
- 14) "Maintenance Care sessions resemble ordinary consultations although with an emphasis on a full spine approach."
- 15) "Patients suitable for Maintenance Care are commonly thought to be those with persistent or episodic pain, who react well to the initial treatment."
- "Patients who received Maintenance Care had better outcome than those who received short-term treatment or short-term sham treatment."
  - A multicenter trial "found a considerable difference in the number of bothersome days, favoring the Maintenance Care group to the one which was encouraged to 'call when needed'."
- 16) "Maintenance Care can clearly be said to be used as a preventive therapeutic concept, although the exact interpretation varies somewhat between chiropractors."
- 17) "The logical approach would obviously be to provide this type of treatment on patients who initially get better with chiropractic care and to do so for as long as it seems useful from the patient's perspective."
- 18) "Chiropractors could obviously play an important role here as 'back pain coaches', as the long-term relationship would ensure knowledge of the patient and trust towards the chiropractor."
- 19) "Back pain is a chronic disease for most, with episodes at short or long intervals. A preventive approach such as Maintenance Care, therefore, makes sense." **[Key Point]**

- It is “not known if it ‘works’ because of the treatment given or because of the clinical encounter, or how these two components interact.”

COMMENTS FROM DAN MURPHY:

We have reviewed these studies also showing benefits to chiropractic Maintenance Care:

Article Review 16-12:

**Health Maintenance Care in Work-Related Low Back Pain and Its Association With Disability Recurrence**

Article Review 23-13:

**A Theoretical Basis for Maintenance Spinal Manipulative Therapy for the Chiropractic Profession**

Article Review 32-14:

**Does Maintained Spinal Manipulation Therapy for Chronic Nonspecific Low Back Pain Result in Better Long-Term Outcome?**

Article Review 42-18:

**Effectiveness of Chiropractic Maintenance Care Versus Symptom-Guided Treatment for Recurrent and Persistent Low Back Pain**

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