

The Secret to a Healthy Spine

A User's Guide to Overcoming Back Pain

Jason Gilbert



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THE SECRET TO A HEALTHY SPINE

By the time most of us think about how important spinal health is, we've already entered into a painful state of dysfunction, or worse still, already have irreversible degenerative changes. If you suffer from back pain, think about all the important aspects of your life that have been negatively impacted. Does it affect your work, your concentration, or possibly even your earning potential? Does it affect your mood and therefore your personal relationships with your loved ones? What about your favourite sport or exercise? How are they affected by your back pain or limitations? Now think about how important these aspects are to your overall happiness and general health. Back pain reduces our quality of life and health on so many levels.

Unfortunately, this is exacerbated by our society's paradigm of worrying about something when it is already bad, when disease has set in or health and function have been lost, instead of focusing on providing our body with what it needs and helping it avoid what it doesn't. Most of us end up in this position not because we lack responsibility, but because we were never taught how to care for our spine in the same way we care for our teeth, in other words, care for instead of treat (when disease has already occurred).

Back pain is not like the flu. It is a normal reflex that our brain activates to advise us that our spine is not functioning correctly, just like hunger is a normal reflex to advise us that we need to nourish ourselves or sleep when our body needs to rest. If our body is signalling its need for attention via pain and we ignore or turn off that signal via medication or alternative methods, we are regrettably allowing it to stay in its state of dysfunction, and invariably delaying and intensifying the suffering that we will experience in the future. While flu symptoms improve when the body has dealt with the cause, pain symptoms don't. They have an underlying cause and if it is not rectified, the symptoms will return, usually more frequently and more intensely in the future.

Back pain and other associated symptoms need to be unpleasant to motivate us to act and focus on the underlying problem. In this book you will learn about the underlying causes of back pain, enabling your body to return to

normal function and consequently allow it to relieve the unpleasant back pain symptoms itself, instead of overriding the reflex and relieving the pain temporarily while the spine continues to function incorrectly and eventually and invariably, degenerate precociously.

You will be empowered with the knowledge necessary to recognize and eliminate the factors in your life that are worsening your spinal health all while learning to introduce factors that your body needs for correct function.

The Secret to a Healthy Spine is the definitive instructional manual, a user's guide, on how to care for, maintain, and rectify problems when they occur. It works. Over 100 000 people all around the world have benefited from this knowledge over the last 25 years. It presents a refreshing, common-sense approach to spinal care, one that I am sure will not only allow your back to be pain-free in no time but one that also promotes the longevity of your spine and quality of your health throughout your life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wealthy people are experts in making, saving, and managing money and as such are frequently listened to by those who would like to accumulate wealth. Similarly, sportspeople who have refined their sport, elevated their fitness to its optimal level, and mastered the discipline required to exceed in their chosen sport, become great coaches. As a highly qualified individual in the area of spinal health, Jason Gilbert not only has profound experience as a professional in his chosen area but also as a patient who started experiencing back pain early in life. Following his spinal surgery, he has had to join the dots to reach a pain-free but highly functional state of spinal health.

Jason first felt back pain at the age of seven. He didn't know it at the time, but his functional and structural spinal problem would eventually lead him to spinal surgery. Well before this, however, these problems led him to study and complete a 5-year master of Chiropractic program, which allowed him to work with hundreds of thousands of people all around the world and, as a result, develop a profound understanding of why back pain occurs. During his journey, he has also accumulated extensive knowledge and achieved the following significant goals, which all contribute to the wealth of understanding that he passes on to you via this book, *The Secret to a Healthy Spine*.

Bachelor of Science, Sydney University 1992

Master of Chiropractic, Macquarie University 1995

Diploma of Acupuncture, Open National University Sri Lanka 1996

Founding member Peruvian Chiropractic Association 1999

Sports practitioner with the World Surfing League 2000–present

Course Instructor at Anhembi Morumbi, first Chiropractic course in Latin America 2000

Pioneer of mission trips to attend to natives of the Peruvian Andes and Amazon region 2001–2012

Private practice at International Chiropractic Institute, Lima, Peru 1998–present

Private practice at Jason Gilbert Chiropractic Clinics Rio, São Paulo and

Santos, Brazil 2000–present

Author of the book *The Secret of a Healthy Spine*, published in Portuguese and Spanish 2009

TV host, 'Emotional Health', Fox Brazil 2010–2014

Sports Practitioner, Nitro Circus 2019

Yoga Teaching Training, 250 hours 2018

Functional Medicinal Health Coach, Truly Heal Program 2019

Jason feels that being expertly qualified to guide you towards spinal health comes from both his own journey with back pain, his academic qualifications, and his deep clinical knowledge gained from listening to and guiding hundreds of thousands of people towards spinal function, and therefore pain-free lifestyles, over the last 3 decades. To add to his extensive resume of spinal experiences, he also underwent surgery for a herniated disc at the L5/S1 level in 2012. Admitting that the pain and sciatica were the worst things that he had ever experienced and that the disc hernia that caused this discomfort the biggest that he had ever encountered further added to his deep appreciation of just how debilitating spinal problems can be. That said, by implementing the rules laid out in the pillars of the *The Secret to a Healthy Spine*, Jason now leads a life that is more mobile and active than ever, one that he enthusiastically shares with others.

It is never too late to restore your spinal health to its optimal level. Never. Even if it's been decades since you last enjoyed full spinal function without any pain, it is important to remember that when the true causes of spinal pain and dysfunction are focused on, pain and other symptoms will invariably decrease with time.

Join us on this journey and learn how.

WHY DO YOU NEED TO LEARN HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR SPINE?

Without being aware of the effects that everyday activities like sleeping, sitting, working, or playing sports have on our spine, we use our body and wait until it degenerates or starts to cause obvious symptoms like pain before we start considering its importance. Our spine protects the critical parts of our nervous system, the spinal cord, and nerve roots, which are responsible for transferring all the information from the brain to the body via nerve impulses. If there are blockages in the communication of these nerve impulses, the body simply starts to change from a state of health or 'ease' to a state of 'disease' because its cells, tissues, and organs cannot function correctly without 100% of the electrical nerve information that originates in the brain. This often happens without any obvious signs (especially in the early phases of any disease process). We continue our lives oblivious to the harmful effects that our traumas, bad posture, minor aches, and a variety of other symptoms derived from emotional problems, job responsibilities, and other daily activities, have on our health and vertebral columns.

The reduction in the normal function of the body occurs so gradually that we do not perceive when it happens. Signs of dysfunction like the black smoke, vibrations, and overheating in the case of a faulty machine become a high fever, pins and needles in the arms, sciatic pain, and headaches in the case of our body. A person who suffers from these symptoms must know that they are actually the consequence of some other cause and not a bodily defect or plain old back luck as many would be inclined to think. Some may even recognize that something, be it a certain activity, posture, action, or even a lack of exercise or nutrients could be contributing to the way they feel. However, most of us do not stop to discover the real cause of these symptoms.

Most people know that taking pain killers to relieve pain or anti-inflammatory medication for something like a herniated disc or osteoarthritis only masks the problem; yet most of the time, they genuinely do not know how else to resolve it. They know that they are not treating the real cause of the symptom and it's just a matter of time before the condition returns and



progresses to more intense and severe symptoms.

For others who look beyond the pain, frustration is also felt when they try to discover the cause of the symptom, and fail to find it. They wake up with back pain but do not realize that they are using an inappropriate mattress; they complain of neck pain and dizziness but don't realize that when they lie in bed and watch television, they are putting their necks in hyperflexion, a position that overloads their cervical region. They fail to relate their lumbar pain or sciatica or the fact that they limp on their right to the fact that their pants are longer on one side than the other, showing a difference in leg length and hence causing overload. They may even consult a medical specialist in the hope of

rectifying the problem but fail since the paradigm of that specialist is focused on symptom relief and not the restoration of normal physiological function. In other words, correcting the problem.



“What good is remorse if it does not change anything that has happened? The best remorse is to simply change.”

JOSÉ SARAGAMO

If, as children, we had received and read an instruction guide detailing how to correctly use our spine and our bodies, we would have learned from the beginning of our lives what should and should not be done to help them function correctly. Knowing that the function of our spine directly affects the function of our body, we would be better equipped to make important decisions about our health, and obviously, avoid unnecessary suffering.



It would not be necessary to first notice a deterioration in our health and feel the unpleasant effects of pain and sickness for us to realize that something was not right. We would know beforehand because we would have learned good habits from early childhood.

Correct posture would always be maintained, as we would obviously know the serious consequences of poor posture on our spine and subsequently our body. We would exercise regularly and perform our domestic duties in a way that would favour correct spinal function. We would drive our car and use our kitchen more efficiently, with less wear and tear on our spine. Above all, we would know that the most important rule would be to take any pain or symptom seriously, to never ignore it, and always look for the underlying cause first. This knowledge would be used to avoid compromising our body's innate function and we would enjoy greater longevity and quality of life, thus slowing the ageing process.

There is no better time than now to start caring for yourself.

Most people take a lifetime to learn about how their body works and how to adequately care for it, however, there are some things that we really need to know from the start, so that we may be able to avoid so many of the afflictions that we end up suffering from. The fact is that we are not born

with an instruction manual – like the ones we receive when we buy any new appliance – and therefore generally only learn how to treat our spine when it already starts to present signs of permanent damage, such as reduced mobility, osteoarthritis, vertebral disc degeneration, or joint dysfunction. The problem is that it is virtually impossible to live in this modern world, with the majority of us working sedentary jobs or performing repetitive movements and other actions that inhibit normal joint function and posture, without compromising the optimal functioning of our spine. We can't expect to move less than the amount that our body innately needs without having serious effects on our health. That is the reason why I wrote this book. Our spine is like any other machine that needs to be understood, respected, and taken care of continuously from the beginning of our lives if we are to enjoy its full potential and see it fulfil its optimal longevity.

In contrast to our teeth which are visible, the spine cannot be seen, which is why we often forget this vital structure. Dentists have educated the general population extremely well about the importance of brushing our teeth at least three times a day, but the role and importance of the teeth (sorry dentists!) do not come close when compared to the importance of the spine. Unfortunately, most people only understand this when their spine has already begun to degenerate, a process that may or may not cause symptoms (the latter being the most frequent scenario). Why do we allow so much time to pass before we start to even think about taking care of our spine?

This book is an instruction manual to your spine, a guide on how to use it, understand it, and take care of it, helping you maintain it in the same state, or as close as possible, to what it was the day you were born, functioning as it should. Any vintage car can be driven a whole lifetime as long as it is well maintained from the moment of purchase. Why should your spine be any different?

This book will help you avoid spinal problems before they arise and teach you how to resolve them when they occur. You'll learn that your back pain is actually a positive, normal reflex, that it deserves attention, and should be seen as an opportunity to search for the underlying cause of the problem. You'll discover the danger of focusing exclusively on your pain and relieving it without first discovering why your body intelligently caused it.

I have been a chiropractic sports practitioner for twenty-six years (a quarter of a century) – and have consulted thousands of people in various countries, with different professions and from varying social classes. I have also been a part of the World Surfing League's Medical team for twenty years, working with their elite athletes. Spinal problems do not discriminate against race, gender,

or social status. Most problems are caused by a simple lack of information and understanding of how to use and care for the spine. Throughout my career, I have been continuously frustrated to see that most of the degenerative problems that we suffer from, such as arthritis and disc degeneration, result from apparently innocuous activities or bad habits repeated daily, month after month, year after year. These problems could generally have been avoided if people had access to information about the future health dangers resulting from these activities. It truly is frustrating to encounter so many people during my career that had absolutely no idea that they were damaging their spines while they were doing it. Equally frustrating for me was seeing patients (most commonly elderly patients) with advanced degeneration that occurred without them knowing, as there was no pain or symptoms and they simply did not comprehend the concept of caring for something that wasn't already symptomatic. Our body does not always communicate to us through pain or obvious symptoms that some particular aspect of our health is not right (think about how many people have cancer for years without knowing and then get told that they have only months to live).

Many health professionals traditionally miss the golden opportunity to restore the health of their patients by focusing on their symptoms and not searching for and identifying the underlying cause. In the following chapters, you will learn that many of these causes are surprisingly simple to rectify by actions such as learning what good posture truly means and how it greatly contributes to spinal health, replacing a soft mattress with a firmer one, organizing your workspace more ergonomically, or walking. The list of simple modifications is extensive and the positive ramifications on the health of the spine and a person's general health even more extensive.

We must understand that while we could get by without an arm or leg or some of our organs, we cannot live without our spine. The spine is absolutely vital for the normal functioning of your body and the fact that it is not visible does not mean that it can be forgotten. Learn as much as possible about it now. You need to nurture it now, as tomorrow it may be too late. Your activities and daily routine will not change, but after reading *The Secret to a Healthy Spine* (your spine's instruction manual), the way you perform your activities will! As is the case with any other machine, wouldn't it be better to read the instruction manual it before you attempt to use the it? This book will help you decide for yourself.

“The body, if properly treated, will last a lifetime.”

NOEL CLARASÓ

HOW TO GET THE MOST BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

The Secret to a Healthy Spine is a comprehensive book containing vital information on the care and maintenance of your spine. It's an instruction manual guiding you in how to use your spine correctly and, as such, has two principal goals: giving you the secrets to a pain-free life and teaching you how to ensure the longevity of your spine.

You will learn that the real definition of health is probably is not what you always thought it was. You will be challenged to learn that back pain and other unpleasant symptoms are actually positive, deliberate reflexes of bodily communication. Unlike other material previously written on this subject, this book will teach you that it is extremely dangerous to simply focus on the pain, concentrating on its relief. To understand this, you must recognize how your body works. You'll find a questionnaire at the start of the chapters for PHYSICAL, CHEMICAL AND EMOTIONAL CAUSES of back pain that will help you to pinpoint the root cause of your pain and symptoms. It will then be easier to read through the book and will allow you to further research potential causes. Even if you are tempted to uncover the cause of your problems quickly, please resist doing so, as you will get a limited understanding of your very unique situation and all of the other possible factors influencing you. Pain and other symptoms are generally caused by multiple factors, especially when the problems are chronic (long-standing).

You will learn about the three main causes of back pain: PHYSICAL, CHEMICAL AND EMOTIONAL.

Information about PHYSICAL CAUSES applies to everybody since everybody 'uses and abuses' their spine every day. The spine is a machine that can be bio-mechanically compromised through so many of the activities and postures that it endures day after day, year after year. The principal causes of these PHYSICAL problems will be discussed and you will learn how to correctly execute these activities, many of which are probable causes of your present or future symptoms.

The focus will then be shifted to CHEMICAL CAUSES of pain and you will

learn how what we eat and ingest can influence our physical and emotional health. Inflammatory foods, drinks and other substances as well as cigarette smoking, alcohol and sugar add to the inflammation caused by the pre-existing physical problems in your life. Why aggravate this inflammation and accelerate damage by unknowingly ingesting substances that will worsen your back pain and other symptoms? This chapter will help you recognize and avoid these silent aggressors.

Lastly, in the chapter EMOTIONAL CAUSES of back pain, you will discover how the power of our mind and the quality of our thoughts and emotions influences our health and the pain we feel. We are all subject to the effects of stress, poor sleep patterns and alterations in the level of happiness. As such, it is very important to recognize when symptoms appear and understand how our emotional state influences our levels of inflammation and consequently, our health.

Imagine revealing to someone who had never brushed their teeth the concept of preventative dental hygiene. Initially, it would be difficult to accept since this habit had never been practiced. However, shortly after commencing with this new habit, it would not only make perfect sense but the results would be observed quickly, validating the decision to change. The concepts that will be presented in this book will leave you with the same degree of satisfaction in regards to your spine. They will empower you with the knowledge to care for your spine yourself instead of relying on someone to relieve your pain when spinal dysfunction finally manifests itself. Some of them may seem ineffective or unnecessary, however, please read with an open mind as they offer the opportunity of a pain-free future if you are accustomed to pain. If you are one of the lucky ones who hasn't suffered back pain until now, these concepts will help you have a healthy, fulfilled lifestyle and the guarantee of a future without being restricted by pain or disability.

The Secret to a Healthy Spine is all about human health optimization on all levels, and in this book, this starts with the spine. You will learn about basic spinal anatomy, and how this relates to the optimal function of the whole body. Covering topics such as flexibility, the definition of health, posture, the role of the nervous system in instructing the body on how to perform basic tasks that you've performed your whole life without actually being told how. This book is a user's guide to the spine and it contains the information necessary to not only keep your spinal health in its actual state but improve its function on all levels. With an optimally functioning spine comes true health (homeostasis), which means 100% cell function.

Understanding the effect of CHEMICAL factors such as your diet, hydration, inflammation, smoking, drinking alcohol, and medication combined with understanding the effect of EMOTIONAL factors, such as stress and psychological pain from the past is imperative. It is only when these factors are considered alongside the more obvious, traditionally recognized PHYSICAL causes of back pain, such as posture, impacts, falls and accidents, and more, that we can start to actually recognize the CAUSE of your back pain or limitation, and consequently resolve it. This allows your body to naturally diminish pain and other symptoms itself.

Have you ever considered that your DIET and SLEEP may be negatively impacting your body and contributing to your spinal dysfunction and/or resultant symptoms? While a dentist at some point has probably instructed you on how to brush your teeth in a way that will guarantee dental health and longevity, more than likely nobody has ever shown you how to correctly EXERCISE, stretch, and strengthen your spine to maintain its optimal function. *The Secret to a Healthy Spine* will guide you through these vital tools.



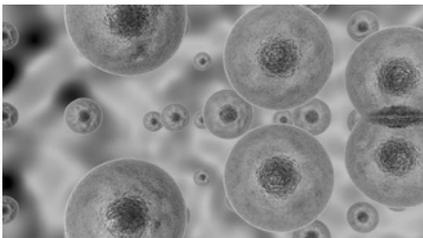
So, get ready for the journey. Whether you are feeling pain or simply want to get your spine to its best possible state of function, in the following chapters *The Secret to a Healthy Spine* will take you on a journey of transformation, one that will help you deal with any challenges better than ever.

Look forward to finally learning the 8 pillars of spinal health, guaranteeing you a life without limitations, a higher quality of health, and the ability to fulfil all of your goals.

HEALTH = 100% FUNCTION

Health is only possible when your body is functioning 100% correctly! In other words, when every cell of your body is working at its full potential.

We start to lose our health when our body starts to function less than 100% correctly. It's as simple as that. As most pathologies affecting our quality of life are degenerative, there are various grades and stages in the degenerative process caused by lack of health. Pain and other symptoms that warn us of these conditions are



often only activated when there is much less than 100% of normal function, for example, as we see often in cases such as cancer, arthritis, and other degenerative illnesses, where people only find out they have a disease when obvious symptoms appear. Undoubtedly, their state of health has been less than optimal for much longer than when their symptoms first appear.

If you eat something rotten and your body intelligently recognizes that and rejects it via the gag (vomit) reflex, you are healthy! You may not feel very well at that moment, but this reaction is totally healthy and necessary. One can say the same thing for fever, coughs, or hiccups, all signs that your innate intelligence is functioning as it should. Our traditional concept of 'health' is related to the suppression of symptoms and resolving emergencies in times of crisis or illness.

Dorland's Dictionary, one of the world's most well-known medical dictionaries and a reference for many doctors and specialists, defines health as "mental, physical and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease and infirmity."

True health is when your body is functioning at 100% of its mental, physical, and emotional potential. If something in your body, a cell, tissue or organ, is not functioning 100% optimally, you are not 'healthy'. You would have degrees of dysfunction and so therefore degrees of sickness, even if you may not be made conscious of it via obvious symptoms such as pain.

Too many people judge their health by how they feel or how they look in the mirror. Sadly, this incorrect definition can result in not only a reduction in the quality of their life while they are alive but also in a death that may be sooner or more painful than what their body was genetically programmed to experience. Therefore, learning the true definition of health is key. It will not only prolong your life but also allow you to enjoy the highest quality of life possible.

WHY DOESN'T THE SYSTEM WORK?

"If someone is searching for health, ask them first if they are willing to avoid the causes of disease in the future; if not, refrain from helping them."

SOCRATES

It is a sad fact that we as humans only worry when there is already a problem. We may have eaten sugary food for years and only worry when the doctor tells us that our insulin levels are dangerously high and that we are pre-diabetic. We may suffer from stomach problems such as gastric reflux or ulcers as a result of an inadequate diet, but only really worry about it when the discomfort is so

strong that it prevents digestion. Many cases of cancer could have been avoided had early symptoms been recognized and taken seriously. Sadly, over 85% of all degenerative illnesses happen as a result of poor lifestyle choices. When we stop to think about it, it is not only our health that we are careless with. Who in their life hasn't driven a car past the date that the mechanic recommends for its next service? Or when the oil or tire air pressure only end up being checked when the temperature is already too hot or the tire is so bald that it's no longer providing traction? And what about our personal relationships? How often do we ignore a problem with a spouse, co-worker, or friend simply because we prefer to avoid the unpleasant possibility of conflict, letting the problem grow to a possibly unbearable or destructive stage? Ignoring these sorts of problems will always result in much more serious consequences somewhere down the line.

As humans, we are simply not accustomed to thinking about prevention nor do we care for what we have while we have it. Without pain or unpleasant reminders, we simply follow the pain-free path, often oblivious to the direction that it is taking us in.

The level of pollution in our world is another example. We have polluted the environment so much and for so long that we're almost to the point of no return, possibly leaving us unable to reverse the situation. There are countless examples of human neglect, where we become conscious of the situation only when it is too late. How many more can you think of?

How many of us are eating greasy, sugary, salty foods and only worry when we become obese or hypertensive (high blood pressure) or, even worse, after a heart attack? We may smoke for decades and understandably believe that, because nothing serious has ever happened, or because "my friend's grandmother smoked her whole life and died at the age of 98" that everything is fine. That is until we are informed by our doctor that we have lung cancer. Many of us live stressful lives, depriving ourselves of sleep, suffering from insomnia and other problems resulting from low immunity such as constant colds and cases of flu, or recurrent allergies but only stop to examine the situation when there is a serious problem. When we reach this stage of neglect, is it really necessary to do the standard medical tests to 'officially' confirm that we're not healthy? Why do so many people abuse their health for so long and use the results of diagnostic tests to supposedly define whether they are healthy or not, as the tests only warn them if they have finally arrived at a measurable level of dysfunction? These diagnostic tests are not a measure of our health, but rather a confirmation of whether we are in a state of disease or not. We must understand that DIS-EASE starts with cellular dysfunction and that this commences way before it gets to measurable levels via pathological exams. DIS-

EASE starts when we lose EASE.

There are no diagnostic methods to measure the exact percentage of health or EASE we have, so we should not have a false sense of confidence when seeing that our DIS-EASE test results 'were not so bad' and continue repeating the same mistakes with our health. This is unfortunately how it plays out for most people.

It is no different when addressing spinal problems since a large percentage of the population misuse their spine without consciously knowing they are doing so and assume that they are fine simply because they feel fine and are symptom-free.

CASE STUDY

David was an apparently healthy, symptom-free 42-year-old who accompanied his wife to a consultation. After hearing that her problems had been developing for decades, despite the pain being very recent, he decided to get examined and take some X-rays. He said that he'd never felt any back pain and, therefore, assumed that there were no problems. During his physical examination, I noticed that his spine was very rigid, with thoracic kyphosis (increased curve of his upper back). He then said that he'd always had difficulty maintaining an upright posture. When we looked at his X-rays, we discovered osteophytes (bone spurs) throughout his whole dorsal spine! David was shocked when he saw the X-ray results and how advanced his arthritis was. His first reaction was, "But I never felt anything".

I have witnessed similar situations happen literally hundreds of times in my twenty-six-year career. The patient is generally astonished when they discover that they have a degenerative problem that has been occurring for decades without any obvious signs such as pain to advise them and allow them to change the factors and environment that are causing the degeneration.

TIP

There is a common misconception about X-rays and how unnecessary radiation may be harmful to our health. It is important to understand that the radiation emitted from microwave ovens, mobile phones and even the amount we receive on a plane during an overseas trip, are all damaging. It simply depends on the dose. Similarly, a one-off set of X-rays, despite having a very low dose of radiation, offer an opportunity to observe the biomechanical effects of years or decades of spinal dysfunction, such as Osteoarthritis (bone/joint degeneration), Degenerative Disc Disease (wear and tear on our discs), or structural anomalies such as scoliosis, etc. Almost always the degeneration discovered in the X-rays

shows that the problem has been present for way longer than the patients' symptoms. It is my opinion, after more than 26 years of clinical experience and seeing tens of thousands of people and their X-rays, that X-rays are an imperative tool to both doctor and patient. Problems discovered in an X-ray can motivate somebody to take continual care of themselves as well as help their practitioners provide the most appropriate stretching and postural advice.

MYTH – Spinal problems always cause pain.

Although many of my patients come to the clinic with back pain or some other symptom related to the spine, most of them have problems that began long before the onset of their pain.

Changes in the biomechanical function of the spine unfortunately take months or years to manifest themselves as pain and other symptoms. Most patients over 35 years of age have some kind of structural 'surprise' when we study their X-rays, as the accumulation of decades of spinal dysfunction results in wear and tear on bones, joints, cartilages and intervertebral discs. This is not totally unexpected, since we are subjected to many PHYSICAL factors such as bumps and traumas, falls, bad postural habits, and other harmful influences that alter the alignment of the spine. If we don't correct the resultant spinal dysfunction of these impacts soon after occurring, our situation will be much like that of a misaligned wheel when it goes over a bump or a hole in the road – the resultant uneven load on the tire wears it out faster.

With this type of degeneration, X-rays literally show the black and white reality of what is occurring.

It is possible to identify areas of the spine or a certain vertebra that have been subjected to excessive forces and therefore manifested bone degeneration in the form of osteoarthritis. I recommend that everyone over 20 years of age get examined by a spinal specialist who understands how to analyse X-rays to determine how their habits and physical traumas have affected the structure of their spine.

After seeing their X-rays many people say, "But I've only been in pain for a week!" or "But the cause of my pain was the fall and that only happened a month ago" and forget the 'other' fall or falls from thirty years ago that inevitably contributed to the bone degeneration they observe on their X-rays. They may also forget that they carried their backpack on the same shoulder for their entire school lives, slept face down their whole lives, played contact sports and many other activities that negatively affect spinal function. This process is similar to the accumulative lung damage that smoking causes, repeated and insidious, as chronic smokers suffer relatively little during the process and

most don't stop to relate the cough to any serious bodily warning sign of the damage they are causing.

Except for acute pain caused by trauma, back pain in most cases appears long after the normal biomechanics of the spine were disrupted.

"We feel the pain, but not its absence."

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

CASE STUDY

Brendan came to my clinic with severe lumbar pain on his right side. He was convinced that the pain had started when he bent down to pick his baby up off the floor. He said that he had never felt a pain like that before and could not remember any previous trauma. Upon examination, I asked him to stand on two scales, with a foot on each one, and discovered that he was 5 kilograms heavier on the right side of his body. During the observation, I realized that his right shoe was also notably more worn out than the left. On his X-rays, I observed that his right leg was 7 mm shorter than the left. There was significantly more load going through his right side. No wonder his spine finally made not clear that it needed attention!

These structural problems had obviously been present for many years, perhaps since he stopped growing or possibly even since he was born. This accumulation of load over the years resulted in a biomechanical compromise that overloaded some areas of his spine more than others. When he bent down, it was simply the straw that broke the camel's back. The body reacted with muscle contraction and inflammation of the lumbar spine and the sciatic nerve, causing extreme pain. This was a perfectly normal reflex caused by the brain to protect him from damaging his spine any further until the brain had the time to access whether his problem posed a threat to the normal function of the nervous system. He was pain-free after receiving a month of chiropractic adjustments, deep tissue massage, and using a heel lift to balance the load between each side of his body.

Our health system is unfortunately partly responsible for cases like Brendan's. We are encouraged to visit a doctor usually only when we are already symptomatic. We are accustomed to losing our health and then having somebody else pay for it. Health funds don't usually pay for health maintenance and as such, we aren't accustomed to paying for it out of our own pockets. It's the same as any other insurance. Car insurance is relevant for paying for damages after an accident or when the car is stolen but does not cover the cost of anything that ensures the longevity of your car, like servicing your car and the regular change of oil and air filters etc.

MYTH – If I am sick, I will feel sick.

Most disease processes develop without any symptoms. Let's consider the case of heart disease. For 80% of people that suffer from cardiac disease, their first symptom is cardiac arrest. Of these people, 12% will die (Statistic from the Centre of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)). That's really sad. Most of these people are examined regularly for the standard markers of heart disease, such as blood pressure and cholesterol, but they still ended up suffering from cardiac arrest. So, what's the problem? Where are we going wrong? Have you ever heard of someone who everyone considers as being 'super fit' and 'the healthiest person I know', dying of a sudden heart attack whilst practicing the sport that they loved? Did that person simply develop a problem just before they died? Probably not. They more than likely suffered from heart problems asymptotically and therefore understandably thought that they were 'healthy'.

Health insurance companies and government health programs, such as Medicare in Australia or the National Health Service in the United Kingdom, cover costs when we are already sick or where there is a suspicion of a disease process occurring. Whether it be a hospital bill for surgery, blood tests for insulin or cholesterol, a visit to an allopathic doctor, or diagnostic imaging to enable a diagnosis of the disease process that the person is already suffering from. Allopathic medicine literally means something that treats the symptoms of disease and not the underlying cause.

TIP

Focus on the key elements of health (diet, exercise, sleep, and emotional state), before you are obliged to treat the consequent lack of health – disease.

Thankfully we have allopathic medicine when we suffer serious accidents, have cancer or cardiac arrest, and during other emergencies, however, we must not confuse the role of the medical doctor with someone who has studied health and specializes in restoring it. My observation is that the general public confuses the definition of health with disease, or in other words, ease with disease, and also confuses the role of the allopathic doctor. As sick people can receive allopathic medicine and 'feel' well after it, they may be excused from confusing how they 'feel' with how they actually 'are'. You'll read more about this in the chapter about the true definition of health. Our doctors don't confuse this sickness or dis-ease paradigm with a health or 'ease' paradigm. It is the rest of society that does this. Their medical course specializes in subjects related to disease and how to diagnose it. They have a negligible amount of information on subjects related to health such as nutrition, exercise, psychology, and

emotional health, the action of vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids, etc. I often compare an MD to a fireman who saves our house when it is burning but plays absolutely no role in the reconstruction of the house after the fire has been put out. Please don't take this as criticism of the medical establishment, it isn't. It's an observation of reality. Most MDs are responsible, dedicated professionals doing what they were trained to do, that is, diagnose and treat disease. They are definitely not trained to restore health when it has been lost or maintain it while we still have it, as their paradigm doesn't include this scope of practice. Health Insurance companies follow this allopathic paradigm and we must realize that by the time we consult a doctor or make a claim with the insurance company that we have already lost our most valuable asset – our health or EASE. As such, too many people are accustomed to ignoring their health until DIS-EASE develops and then have someone else PAY for the treatment of disease, instead of INVESTING in their health to maintain it and obviously avoid the unnecessary suffering that disease causes. Investing in their health would include such things as a healthy diet high in nutritive value, avoiding toxins of any type such as processed food, cigarettes, alcohol, etc., and adopting healthy practices such as regular exercise, good sleep habits, avoiding toxic thoughts, etc.

CASE STUDY

Carol had suffered from back pain for twelve years before visiting my clinic. She had been to several specialists and had been taking anti-inflammatory drugs on and off for five years without any results. After thirty sessions of physical therapy recommended by an orthopaedic surgeon, she went to another orthopaedic doctor who had told her to do an MRI to investigate the possibility of a herniated disc or some other kind of degeneration. There was no arthritis or disc degeneration detected. She returned for 20 more physical therapy sessions and was treated with anti-inflammatory and anti-depressant drugs. Understandably worried by the fact that she was still symptomatic, her Orthopaedic surgeon even recommended a simple surgery, where superficial nerves would be severed to impede the painful stimulus. Since Carol did not want surgery, she consulted three other specialists, and each proposed a different treatment: ranging from therapy with a psychologist (because the problem was thought to be psychological), to trying chiropractic to simply living with the pain and accepting that there was no solution. During her first visit to my clinic, I examined her and asked when the pain was more intense. Carol said that she always felt more pain in the morning than during the day. After asking her about her mattress, I found out it was very soft and over twenty years old! When I explained the importance of a good quality firm mattress for spinal

health she was surprised. She had never stopped to consider that possibility and initially rejected the idea since she had consulted so many specialists and tried so many different treatments over the years. She questioned, “But how could something so simple have such an impact?” I asked Carol to buy a firmer mattress, and until she did, to sleep on the floor with blankets as padding. She felt a difference the very first night! Her pain began to subside and after a week on the new supportive mattress, she was pain-free!

MYTH – Just because the cause of your pain has not been identified by a health professional doesn’t mean that there isn’t a cause that is responsible for the unpleasant symptoms you are feeling.

The factors that cause disease and pathology can be present for many years before causing pain and other symptoms. These factors are often inconspicuous and apparently ‘insignificant’ to most of us and usually right under our noses. We cannot rely on the absence or presence of these symptoms to gauge our health. The fact that this happens is understandable since we have never been instructed on how to correctly use our spine or our body.

TIP – It must be understood that, like any machine with its moving parts, our spine needs care and continual maintenance. As I mentioned previously, this is a concept that we all understand very well when it comes to our teeth.

Dentistry has done an excellent job in teaching us the importance of brushing our teeth, flossing regularly, and having preventative check-ups. Today, it is rare to see people with bad teeth. Most people, regardless of their economic status, know how to take care of their teeth. This is as basic as taking a bath to keep the body clean and is virtually automatic. Couldn’t spinal care also become as easy and widely practiced? Imagine the impact on the way we age, the amount of medication we take for back pain, the resultant absence of chronic side effects related to medication, and the incredible feeling of flexibility and mobility that this habit would bring to our lives. When was the last time you met a healthy elderly person with terrible posture or a sedentary lifestyle? That’s right, they don’t exist. Poor posture and good health simply don’t go hand in hand. Lack of physical activity and poor posture are not congruent with maintaining health and we need a healthy spine to allow both.

Unlike the pharmaceutical industry who invests billions of dollars in drug research and allopathy, there has been no financial investment made in creating the content of this book. *The Secret to a Healthy Spine* is the result of over twenty-

six years of clinical experience with over one hundred thousand patients from all economic classes, educational backgrounds, and ages. By simply listening to them, examining them, and joining the dots I was able to find the real cause of their symptoms and accumulate solid information on the actual cause of their spinal dysfunction and resultant back pain.

I made a habit of asking my patients over these years: “Why?” “Why does the pain only appear on the right side of the body?” “Why do the headaches always start at the end of the day?” “Why do you have lower back pain in the morning, just after getting up?” “Why have you been pain free your whole life until last week?”

Unlike allopathic treatments for pain and disease (which don’t include finding the root cause of the problem), I learned that focusing on my patients’ past experiences was a great tool in answering the question ‘why?’ This is how I helped them resolve their pain and symptoms, while also saving them from any other more dangerous conditions that could have resulted if the problem was left uncorrected.

By using just a little common sense and being relentless in finding the real reason ‘why?’, you will observe that everyday activities such as getting in and out of bed a certain way, the choice of high heels that you use, the food we eat and the quality of our emotions can have harmful effects on our health and consequently, our spinal health. I didn’t learn this at university or read it in a medical journal. I simply listened to my patients. It’s simply common sense. Listen to the complaint, identify the cause and remove it. When we combine these findings with a basic knowledge of anatomy and biomechanics, health, and physiology, we can see that the contents of this book make perfect sense without needing to spend billions of dollars on scientific research.

Similarly, it is not necessary to teach your body how it works. Since pain is ‘painful’ and unpleasant, your body’s intelligent warning system innately warns you of potential danger. As such, it is not the intention of your body to have you treat and relieve the pain when it manifests, it simply wants you to remove the cause that you yourself created.

When we speak of spinal-related problems, pain doesn’t always manifest itself when it should with many activities and influences in our lives harming our spine, without us being aware of it.

In conditioning yourself to ask ‘why?’ you’ll do your own ‘research’ regarding what is and what isn’t favourable for your spine. You’ll begin to listen to the symptoms of your body, relating them to your lifestyle, and consequently preserving your spine and your health with the added benefit of living pain-free!