

The Flu: Sorting Fact from Fiction

It's that time of year again – flu season. You are no doubt being encouraged to “Stop Fluin’ Around” and get your annual flu shot. “Fluin’ Around” – that's the cute new marketing campaign from Novartis.¹ Novartis is even having a Video contest for the best video on the flu. For the younger crowd “Scrub Club” has the evil *Influenza Enzo* to scare the heck out of children so they want to get the flu shot.² If you're too busy, lazy or out of shape you don't even have to get out of your car these days to get your flu shot – you can just get it from a drive through.³

If you question the wisdom of this annual rite of passage you are not alone in your disdain for the flu shot. You'll be happy to know that science is on your side. For example, there is the study that was done in Ontario to determine whether the incidence of influenza there decreased following the introduction of their Universal Influenza Immunization Campaign (UIIC) in 2000.⁴ They found that there has not been a decrease in the mean monthly influenza rate following the introduction of their campaign. The authors concluded:

“Despite increased vaccine distribution and financial resources towards promotion, the incidence of influenza in Ontario has not decreased following the introduction of the UIIC.”

In another study in the Archives of Internal Medicine that looked at the role of the flu vaccine in relation to benefit, the authors attributed the decline in influenza related mortality among people aged 65 to 74 years in the decade after the 1968 pandemic to the acquisition of immunity to the emerging A(H3N2) virus.⁵ The researchers could not correlate increasing vaccination coverage after 1980 with declining mortality rates in *any age group* (emphasis mine). They concluded that because fewer than 10% of all winter deaths were attributable to influenza in any season, that observational studies substantially *overestimate vaccination benefit* (emphasis ours).

In another study in the British Medical Journal published just last year and funded by the Cochrane Collaboration, an independent non-profit foundation, the safety and efficacy of the current flu vaccine recommended policy is challenged.⁶ They begin their paper by stating:

“Each year enormous effort goes into producing influenza vaccines for that specific year and delivering them to appropriate sections of the population. Is this effort justified?”

Their report summary was alarming and questioned the use of the flu vaccine as follows:

- Public policy worldwide recommends the use of inactivated influenza vaccines to prevent seasonal outbreaks
- Because viral circulation and antigenic match vary each year and non-randomized studies predominate, systematic reviews of large datasets from several decades provide the best information on vaccine performance
- Evidence from systematic reviews show that inactivated vaccines have little or no effect on the effects measured
- Most studies are of poor methodological quality and the impact of confounders is high
- Little comparative evidence exists on the safety of these vaccines
- Reasons for the current gap between policy and evidence are unclear, but given the huge resources involved, a re-evaluation should be urgently undertaken

Another study in *The Lancet* questions the benefits of flu shots for elderly people and says the benefits are “greatly exaggerated.”⁷ The researchers stated that the public policy for the elderly getting flu shots is based on flimsy, even nonexistent, evidence. Dr. Lisa Jackson was quoted in a news story about her research stating:

“The message is: We should not be basing our vaccine policy on data that is faulty”

They went on in their paper:

“We find it peculiar that the claims that influenza vaccination can prevent half, or more, of all winter deaths in elderly people have not been more vigorously debated.”

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Their study showed that unvaccinated seniors died at a higher rate for reasons unrelated to flu and they also stated that increasing vaccination rates since 1980 have not lowered death rates among the elderly. Jackson calls for a more realistic assessment of the vaccine's benefits that may push researchers to begin studying other strategies to help the elderly avoid flu and its complications.

In terms of side effects, some studies have shown an association between Guillian Barre' syndrome and flu shots.^{8,9} Interestingly the author of the second study - Jurrlink - was quoted in a news story as comparing the risk of getting GBS from the vaccine to being struck by lightning. Lightening, it turns out, killed 47 people in 2006.

In terms of the risk benefit ratio reports claim that influenza kills 30,000 to 40,000 Americans every year. Though the CDC lumps the flu and pneumonia in together for these numbers. According to Mercola the actual number of deaths attributable to the flu itself is less than 1000 a year.¹⁰

Add to all of this that the majority of influenza vaccines distributed in the United States contain Thimerosal and that while highly controversial, this methyl mercury based preservative has been claimed to be linked to autism, Alzheimer's, and ADD.

So as you get ready to begin the holiday season take a look at your options – drive through, deli style, or mist style... or you could take the advice of the National Vaccine Information Center:¹¹

1. If you have the flu, stay home until you are well
2. If you know a person sick with the flu, avoid contact until they are well
3. Wash your hands frequently
4. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water
5. Get adequate rest
6. Eat a wholesome diet rich in vitamins and minerals, especially foods containing vitamin D (such as cod liver oil)
7. Spend a few minutes a day in sunlight to help your body make and store vitamin D.
8. Consider **chiropractic adjustments**, homeopathic remedies and other natural options for healing and maintaining health.
9. Exercise regularly when you are well.
10. Lower stress through meditation and other healthy lifestyle changes.

Notice the recommendation by the NVIC that people add chiropractic to their strategy for warding off and fighting the flu and its effects this season.

Spinal adjustments can have a positive effect on immune function, according to a growing number of researchers who are exploring the common denominators in disease processes, and the role of the nervous, immune, and hormonal systems in development of immune related illnesses. Chiropractic corrects

spinal abnormalities called vertebral subluxations that result in interference of the nervous system by affecting the function of nerves. Since the nervous system controls all functions of the body -- including the immune system -- chiropractic care can have a positive effect on immune function.

According to a press release by the World Chiropractic Alliance: "Contemporary research is beginning to shed light on the neurobiological mechanisms which may explain the outstanding clinical results chiropractors have experienced when managing patients with viral and infectious diseases." stated Dr. Christopher Kent, WCA Vice President.¹²

Dr. Kent explained: "A comprehensive review of the research literature reveals the current understanding that the brain and immune system are the two major adaptive systems in the body. During an immune response, the brain and the immune system 'talk to each other' and this process is essential for maintaining homeostasis or balance in the body."

Since its inception, chiropractic has asserted that viruses and microbes don't threaten us all equally and that a healthy immune system easily repels most invaders. The immune system protects us from the flu, as well as any other infectious disease, and strives to get us well again when we do fall ill. Our immune system, like every other system in the body, is coordinated and controlled by the nervous system.

Chiropractors are also aware of the importance of positive health life style practices (rest, drinking ample quantities of water, diet, exercise, proper food choices, use of high potency multivitamins and minerals, and stress reduction approaches) that can also positively influence the nervous system and immune response. According to a large study of the chiropractic profession recently conducted by the Institute for Social Research, Ohio Northern University chiropractors also customarily advise their patients as to the benefits of these other modalities in optimizing overall body function.¹³

Chiropractors helping patients battle the flu is not a new occurrence either. During the 1917-18 influenza epidemic, which brought death and fear to many Americans, it has been estimated that 20 million people died throughout the world, including about 500,000 Americans. It was chiropractic's success in caring for flu victims that led to the profession's licensure in many states. Researchers reported that in Davenport, Iowa, out of the 93,590 patients treated by medical doctors, there were 6,116 deaths -- a loss of one patient out of every 15. Chiropractors at the Palmer School of Chiropractic adjusted 1,635 cases, with only one death. Outside Davenport, chiropractors in Iowa cared for 4,735 cases with only six deaths -- one out of 866. During the same epidemic, in Oklahoma, out of 3,490 flu patients under chiropractic care, there were only seven deaths. Furthermore, chiropractors were called in 233 cases given up as lost after medical treatment, and reportedly saved all but 25. In another report covering 4,193 cases by 213 chiropractors 4,104 showed complete recovery.^{14,15}

"These results are not so surprising given what we now know about the interaction between the nervous system and the immune system" stated Dr. Matthew McCoy, WCA Board member and Editor of the *Journal of Vertebral Subluxation Research*. "Through research we know that chiropractic has

beneficial effects on immunoglobulins, B-lymphocytes (white blood cells), pulmonary function and other immune system processes." One series of studies, conducted by Patricia Brennan Ph.D and her team, found that when a chiropractic "manipulation" was applied to the middle back, the response of polymorphonuclear neutrophils (white blood cells) taken from blood collected 15 minutes after the manipulation was significantly higher than blood collected 15 minutes before and 30 and 45 minutes after the chiropractic procedure. This research demonstrated an "enhanced respiratory burst" following the chiropractic adjustment. This "burst" is needed for our immune cells to destroy invading viruses and bacteria.^{16,17}

Another small study of HIV positive patients was conducted to study the effects of specific chiropractic adjustments to correct vertebral subluxations in the upper neck on the immune systems of HIV positive individuals. Over the six-month period of the study, the group that did not receive chiropractic care experienced a 7.96% decrease in CD4 cell counts, while the adjusted group experienced a 48% increase in CD4 cell counts over the same period.¹⁸

A large retrospective study conducted by Dr. Robert Blanks and colleagues studied 2,818 individuals undergoing chiropractic care. These individuals reported an average overall improvement, ranging from 7-28%, in a battery of physical symptoms including stiffness/lack of flexibility in the spine, physical pain, fatigue, incidence of colds and flu, headaches, menstrual discomfort, gastrointestinal disorders, allergies, dizziness and falls. More importantly, the incidence of colds and flu was reduced by an average of 15% in this large population who were undergoing regular chiropractic care.¹⁹

According to Dr. Terry Rondberg, president of the World Chiropractic Alliance, "While we would love to say we (chiropractors) figured this out, the truth is we didn't. We simply take advantage of it to help our patients." He added that, "In many ways this is old news since the relationship between the nervous system and the immune system was reported by the New York Times in 1993. According to that article 'Scientists have found the first evidence of an anatomical connection between the nervous system and the immune system. Nerve cell endings in the skin and white blood cells of the immune system are in intimate contact, and chemicals secreted by the nerves can shut down immune system cells nearby.' Our health care system needs to catch up with the research."²⁰

Any person concerned about the upcoming flu season should add chiropractic to their list of things to do to remove interference to their nervous system, enhance their immune function and give their body every extra bit of security it needs.

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