



# Chiropractic: In Depth

## Chiropractic

Chiropractic is a licensed health care profession that emphasizes the body's ability to heal itself. Treatment typically involves manual therapy, often including spinal manipulation. Other forms of treatment, such as exercise and nutritional counseling, may be used as well.



## What Chiropractors Do

Chiropractors approach patient care in a manner similar to that used in conventional medicine. They interview the patient, obtain a detailed health history, perform an examination, do tests, and develop a working diagnosis. They then develop a management plan, start treatment, and monitor the patient's progress. Chiropractors often treat problems related to the musculoskeletal system.

The manual treatment methods used by chiropractors range from stretching and sustained pressure to specific joint manipulations, which are usually delivered by hand and involve a quick and gentle thrust. The purpose of the manipulations is to improve joint motion and function. Manipulations are most commonly done on the spine, but other parts of the body may also be treated in this way.

## Education and Licensure of Practitioners

- To practice in the United States, chiropractors must earn a Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.) degree, pass the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners exam, and have a state license. Many states also require chiropractors to pass an exam about state-specific laws, and all states require practicing chiropractors to take continuing education classes.
- To enroll in a D.C. program in the United States, which typically takes 4 years to complete, students must have had at least 3 years of undergraduate education.
- Institutions that award the D.C. degree are accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education, which is recognized as an accrediting agency by the U.S. Secretary of Education. In 2017, there were 15 accredited D.C. programs on 18 campuses.
- Chiropractic education includes classes in basic sciences, such as anatomy and physiology, and supervised clinical experience in which students learn skills such as spinal assessment, adjustment techniques, and making diagnoses.
- Some chiropractors complete postgraduate education in specialized fields, such as orthopedics or pediatrics.

The scope of chiropractors' practice (that is, the types of services they are allowed to provide) varies from state to state. Health insurance plans may cover chiropractic, but coverage may be partial rather than complete.

## **For More Information**

## NCCIH Clearinghouse

The NCCIH Clearinghouse provides information on NCCIH and complementary and integrative health approaches, including publications and searches of Federal databases of scientific and medical literature. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.

**Toll-free in the U.S.:** 1-888-644-6226

**Telecommunications relay service (TRS):** 7-1-1

**Website:** <https://www.nccih.nih.gov>

**Email:** [info@nccih.nih.gov](mailto:info@nccih.nih.gov)

## Know the Science

NCCIH and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) provide tools to help you understand the basics and terminology of scientific research so you can make well-informed decisions about your health. [Know the Science](#) features a variety of materials, including interactive modules, quizzes, and videos, as well as links to informative content from Federal resources designed to help consumers make sense of health information.

[Explaining How Research Works \(NIH\)](#)

[Know the Science: How To Make Sense of a Scientific Journal Article](#)

[Understanding Clinical Studies \(NIH\)](#)

## PubMed®

A service of the National Library of Medicine, PubMed® contains publication information and (in most cases) brief summaries of articles from scientific and medical journals. For guidance from NCCIH on using PubMed, see [How To Find Information About Complementary Health Approaches on PubMed](#).

**Website:** <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

This publication is not copyrighted and is in the public domain. Duplication is encouraged.

NCCIH has provided this material for your information. It is not intended to substitute for the medical expertise and advice of your health care provider(s). We encourage you to discuss any decisions about treatment or care with your health care provider. The mention of any product, service, or therapy is not an endorsement by NCCIH.

**Last Updated:** April 2019