

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY PET NEEDS TO BE ADJUSTED?

A GUIDE TO CHIROPRACTIC CARE
FOR YOUR PET



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INTRODUCTION

Chiropractic care is a holistic approach to many health problems experienced by your pet. It does not replace traditional veterinary medicine, but provides a supplementary method of care. Chiropractic care is recommended for all types of pets, as proper spinal function allows the body to work more effectively and stay healthy. This booklet is designed to identify the many benefits of chiropractic care for your pet, and to provide you a checklist to determine when your pet is in need of chiropractic adjustments.

THE SPINAL COLUMN

The spinal column is a complex structure made of bones, ligaments, muscles and nerves. The spine provides many crucial functions to the body, which include:

- a framework of support
- muscle attachment
- protection of the central nervous system
- protection of internal organs

The bones of the spinal column are called vertebrae. The spinal cord passes through central canal in each vertebra. Nerves branch off the spinal cord and exit between the vertebrae to attach to the muscles and organs of the body. Numerous ligaments connect these vertebrae together into a jointed column. Your pet has approximately two hundred joints in the spinal column and numerous muscles are attached to the vertebra enabling the spinal column to flex and bend.

WHAT IS A SUBLUXATION?

Chiropractors use the term *subluxation* to describe a specific problem or disease of the spinal column. A subluxation is defined as a misaligned vertebra that is unable to move correctly. When movement between two vertebrae is restricted, your pet will not have total flexibility of its spine and will experience stiffness, resistance, and a lack of mobility. Subluxations also cause problems in the nervous system especially at areas where nerves exit between two vertebrae. When two vertebrae become misaligned pressure is exerted on the spinal nerves and interfere with nerve transmission. Nerves are the communication lines of the body, which carry information back and forth between the brain and the cells. Subluxations may be pictured as pinching or altering that flow of information. Depending on the area and amount of nerve interference, problems can often develop in the body.

Every movement, from the wagging of a tail to sitting, requires a constant synchronization of muscles that contract and relax. If proper nerve messages to the muscles are obstructed, this synchronization falters. Minor interference may result only in slight changes in performance. In high levels of competition, however, even these slight changes may affect physical performance. Lack of muscle coordination can cause

missteps resulting in damage to the joints and tendons of the legs. Nerve pressure can also result in pain, which prevents pets from reaching their full potential.

Subluxations in the spine may also cause your pet to compensate in movement or posture which can lead to pain and muscular imbalances. Your pet may attempt to avoid the pain of a subluxation by shifting its weight or by avoiding certain movements. When the spine is not functioning correctly in one area, stress is placed on other vertebral joints. These secondary subluxations can occur in other areas of the spinal column and complicate the health problems for your pet. For example, pain in the right sacroiliac joint causes your pet to shift forward onto its left forelimb. Or, pain at the upper neck prevents your pet from flexing at the base of the skull.

WHAT CAUSES SUBLUXATIONS?

Traumatic and stressful situations can occur daily and cause subluxations. Sustained vigorous exercise can also cause problems in the spinal column of your pet.

Subluxations can be caused by:

- **Trauma**, such as a fall, slip or misstep.
- **Conformation traits**, such as a long back which creates predisposition to subluxations.
- **Birth**, as trauma during delivering causes initial misalignments in the soft and plastic spine of the newborn.
- **Confinement**, which prevents your pet from rolling around in a natural attempt to loosen their back decreases balance and coordination.
- **Performance type** – jumping, running and playing each affect pets in different ways and result in subluxations.
- **Poorly fitting equipment**, such as improperly worn collars, harnesses and coats may cause problems in the spine.
- **Age** causes the spine to accumulate multiple large and small injuries and compensations.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A SUBLUXATION?

Subluxations of the spinal column can produce many diverse symptoms in your pet. The most common problem is pain. Pets in pain compensate in gait or posture and may resist or refuse to perform. Compensating movements may cause other problems by adding stress on joints. The symptoms that could indicate the pain is resulting from a subluxation include:

- Abnormal and varying posture when standing
- Discomfort when playing, jumping or running
- Evasions, such as extending the head and neck or hollowing the back

- Development of unusual behavior patterns
- Facial expression of apprehension or pain
- Sensitivity to touch

Subluxations can cause changes in muscle coordination and flexibility that affect the performance ability of your pet. These symptoms of subluxation include:

- Lack of coordination in gait
- Unusual, perhaps indefinable, gait abnormalities that vary from limb to limb depending on gait
- Stiffness in lateral movements of neck or back
- Muscle atrophy
- Shortened stride in one or two limbs
- Inability to engage rear quarters
- Improper frame
- Decreased stride length
- Difficulty flexing the neck
- Lameness
- Lack of engaging the back when moving (only uses the legs)

Subluxations may cause problems in the nerves that supply other cells, such as those of the skin, glands, and blood vessels. These symptoms of subluxation include:

- Unusual body or tail rubbing
- Increased sensitivity to heat or cold
- Asymmetrical sweating or lack of sweating

HOW ARE SUBLUXATIONS CORRECTED?

When subluxations are identified in the spine, an animal chiropractor endeavors to correct the misalignment by performing what is called an adjustment. An adjustment is a short, rapid thrust onto a vertebra in the direction that will return it to its correct position. Chiropractic adjustments are unique to chiropractic care - jerking on legs or tails is not a chiropractic adjustment. An examination before the adjustment will identify all the subluxations of the spinal column. An adjustment uses a controlled force. The joints of the spine are moveable and, if the correct angle is used, the adjustment is relatively easy. Animal chiropractors may also manipulate the jaw and the joints of the legs. These adjustments release the “stuck” vertebra and restores alignment thus eliminating nerve pressure. The bodies can then repair tissues and restore function.

As with many health practitioners, chiropractors have many different types of techniques that are used. Most veterinary chiropractors use only their hands to adjust your pet using leverage on the vertebra of pets, vertebra that are distinctive in size and shape. Some chiropractic doctors use a small impacting device, called an activator, to move vertebra. The device is effective due to its specificity and speed.

The most common misunderstanding concerning chiropractic care is why several adjustments may be needed to resolve a complaint. The muscles and ligaments of your pet must be able to maintain the correct spinal alignment. Several adjustments may be needed until the body accepts and maintains the correct alignment. Most pets will demonstrate significant improvement with one to four adjustments however, chronic spinal problems take longer to respond. Pets that are basically sound with a conformation suited to the best of their abilities respond quickly to adjustments and maintain spinal alignment longer.

WHAT IS WELLNESS CARE?

Chiropractic care can be used as a way to both prevent and treat injury and disease. At WNCM our goal is to help our patients achieve their optimal health and prevent pain. We believe regular chiropractic care is important to promote wellness for your pet. This is why it is important to continue chiropractic care even after the symptoms of an injury have subsided.

DOES YOUR PET HAVE SUBLUXATIONS?

CHECKLIST:

Chiropractors are trained to locate and correct subluxations. Trainers or owners can also check to discover if their pets are experiencing problems with their spinal column. Use this checklist as a guideline to determine if your pet is in need of chiropractic care. If you answer “no” to most of the questions below, chiropractic care may be necessary for your pet. The checklist provides a guideline only – an animal chiropractor can provide further insight into the chiropractic needs of the animal.

General Appearance and Posture

Look at your pet while they are sitting, standing, and lying down.

- | YES | NO | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your pet look comfortable in all positions? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they stand with even weight on all legs? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Looking down from above, is their back straight from ears to tail? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is their head straight (no tilt or rotation)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Looking from the side, is their back straight with <i>no</i> hump or sway? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they sit square (not off to the side)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they always lay on both sides comfortably? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they hold their tail straight (not to one side)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they stand square (one leg isn't forward or back or pulled up under)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are their buttocks level (one side isn't higher than the other)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are their hocks at proper height (not closer to the ground than they should be)? |

Palpation

Feel all over your pet's body.

- | YES | NO | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your pet feel relaxed and at ease through the procedure? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they <i>not</i> flinch or pull away when you touch a certain spot? Is your pet free of pain? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your pet like to be petted and scratched all over (not more or less so in certain areas)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the muscles on one side of the body match the other side in tone and symmetry? (Muscles should be firm without being too hard or too soft, and should not be painful to moderate pressure of palpation). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Palpate down the spine for prominent deviations - are there no bumps? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Compare the top of the hip bones - are they level? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Apply moderate downward pressure on the back. Does the back flex and dip? |

Gait and Performance

Watch your pet walking, trotting and running.

- | YES | NO | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the gaits even and free in movement? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is your pet free of signs of lameness? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there <i>no</i> head bob due to pain? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the gaits free and not shortened (no shortening of stride length)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Can they bend when turning? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Can your pet lift their paws? |

Range of Motion

The pet should move freely in all ranges of motion with no tension.

- | YES | NO | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Can your pet bend its head to touch its belly? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does each leg move freely frontwards, backwards, side to side? |

If you have answered “no” to many of the above questions, your pet may require chiropractic care. The next section will discuss how to choose an appropriate practitioner for your pet.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ANIMAL CHIROPRACTOR

Always have your veterinarian examine the pet first to determine if problems exist that require medical or surgical attention. When choosing an animal chiropractor, always ensure they are properly certified, such as Jennifer Heick DC, CAC.

THE CERTIFIED ANIMAL CHIROPRACTOR

The American Veterinary Chiropractic Association trains and certifies chiropractors and veterinarians in the art and science of animal adjusting. In Ontario, Animal Chiropractors with this advanced training are able to accept animal cases with concurrent veterinary care. To become certified as an animal chiropractor, the practitioner must first be either a veterinarian doctor or a doctor of chiropractic (DC). Additional training is then needed before being designated as a Certified Animal Chiropractor (CAC).

Dr. Jennifer Heick is a Doctor of Chiropractic, licensed in Ontario to diagnose and treat neuro-musculoskeletal disorders in humans and animals. She received chiropractic training from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, with additional training for animals from the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association. She has been treating animals at her clinic, Waterloo North Chiropractic & Massage since 1997.

For more information on animal chiropractic and certified animal chiropractors please write or call:

American Veterinary Chiropractic Association - AVCA
avcadoctors.com