

Chiropractic for Children?

Written by Harriet Hall
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Amy Differ from Elk Grove, California, inquires about what she heard other mothers saying in a waiting room. "I was shocked to hear that many of them take their children to chiropractors and even have newborns adjusted for supposed misalignment that happens at birth! Have you heard about this? How dangerous is this? Have you heard anything about chiropractic therapy for autism?"

I've heard about it. I think it's appalling. Medical doctors and even some chiropractors agree that chiropractic manipulation should never be done on young children. Most of a newborn's bones aren't even bone yet - they're partly cartilage. One chiropractor tried to tell me a newborn's neck is stretched up to 2 1/2 times normal length during the birth process, which is anatomically impossible. There is NO credible evidence that the birth process harms babies' spines or that chiropractic benefits children in any way.

The danger is not just from the manipulations themselves but from unnecessary x-rays, and from the cynical attempts of some chiropractors to discredit the child's pediatrician. There are actually guidelines on the Internet: ask Mom which side the child breastfed more on, say "I thought so" and ask, "Didn't your pediatrician ever ask you that?"

Some chiropractors want to become your primary source of health care. This could be really dangerous, because studies have shown that many chiropractors failed to recognize the symptoms of medical emergencies like heart attacks in adults and fever in very young infants. In one heartbreaking case, a chiropractor's son died of meningitis because Dad treated him with chiropractic adjustments instead of taking him to a hospital. Perhaps the most dangerous thing is that at least half of chiropractors don't support immunizations and thereby endanger our public health.

On the other hand, some chiropractic care of children is pretty safe: the kind where the child sits on Mom's lap and the chiropractor only touches Mom. No, I'm not making that up.

As for autism, chiropractors will tackle that along with ADHD, ear infections, bedwetting, asthma, and just about every other childhood problem. Some children improve, but not because of the chiropractic adjustments.