

I Have a Dream!

Daniel Batchelor, DC

The following is an e-mail I received from a potential future colleague, and my advice to her:

Dear Dr. Batchelor:

I have read your articles on chiropractic and sports injuries for the past several years; I find them quite interesting. In fact, you have stimulated my interest in becoming a doctor of chiropractic! I have some questions for you. I am interested in chiropractic sports medicine. How did you get into chiropractic, and what do you like most about it? How many years have you been a doctor? Because I am female, and not that strong, would it be too stressful on my body to treat large and/or heavy patients? I'd appreciate any other information about chiropractic you could provide. I have a dream to become a chiropractor, and want to fulfill that dream before I am 32 years of age.

Yelena Herron

Dear Yelena:

I had the same dream to become a sports medicine doctor of chiropractic when I was in my early 20s; now, I enjoy living that dream. It made perfect sense to me that I should enter a profession that gave no pills and performed no surgery, but dealt with improving the function of the human frame without taking away from or adding anything to its structure. Improving the structure and function of the human body by natural means interested me greatly. Chiropractic first; drugs or surgery last.

I began practice in 1980 in Roswell, Ga., after receiving my doctorate at the age of 25. I have practiced at that location ever since. My first introduction to chiropractic, however, was at age 14, when I became a golf caddy at a local country club. Caddying, as you know, involves carrying golf clubs on one side of the body. After caddying for a few years, I began to develop lower back pain that progressed into sciatica down my right leg. Being a runner at the time, the last thing I wanted was to have my favorite exercise ripped out from beneath me because of an ache or a pain.

I was young and uneducated concerning chiropractic, so I rested my back for several months; when that didn't help, my mother made an appointment for me with a local medical doctor. I took the prescribed painkillers and muscle relaxants, but neither helped me. When I attempted to run any distance greater than one-fourth of a mile, the muscles on the right side of my lower back would cramp, and an electricity-like pain would radiate down my right leg. If I tried to run through the pain, I had to shorten my stride; even then, the pain eventually became so intense I had to stop. I became an "average non runner" at 14 years of age. I assumed my running days were over.

Fortunately, the gods must have been watching, as my brother soon received his doctorate in chiropractic. He examined me thoroughly and determined the cause of my pain was from a muscle imbalance that had developed on one side of my body from carrying golf clubs day in and day out. The one-sided muscle imbalance had rotated the two lower lumbar vertebrae out of position, causing them to pinch sensitive nerves that exit between the vertebrae.

Certain activities can cause muscle and structural imbalances: carrying a baby on one hip or sleeping on one side; sleeping on your stomach with your head turned; carrying a purse; using a phone on one side of your neck; using the mouse on a computer; playing tennis; bowling; skateboarding; or waterskiing, to name a few. Over time, these imbalances can translate into pain or nerve impingement in your back or neck.

A trauma such as an auto accident can rotate and injure sensitive structures of the spine, but pain can also result from nontraumatic events. Similar to a decaying tooth, you don't feel the symptoms until the condition has already developed. It's the same way with a heart attack: 60 percent of the time, the first symptom of a heart problem is the heart attack itself.

Many people wonder why they "suddenly" develop back pain. They explain to me that they have not lifted anything or done anything to cause injury. It commonly takes 5, 10, 15, even 20 years for a developing imbalance to express itself with pain symptoms in the back. It's not necessary to have fallen or lifted something for serious back pain to develop.

Every day, I explain to patients how the spine works, and how my condition and other people's conditions have been corrected through chiropractic. It's much easier to relate to a patient when I personally have "been there and done that" regarding back pain correction.

Here is how my back condition was corrected, back when I was 14: My brother, Dr. Brad Batchelor, first examined my spine, performed an X-ray exam, analyzed the results, then put all the information together and explained what he had found. He showed me my X-rays, then gently adjusted the bones in my lower back into a more normal position. His adjustments were aimed at moving my spinal bones. Similar to putting braces on the teeth, spinal adjustments gradually move the vertebrae into a more normal position. Just as you cannot rush the teeth into a more normal position with braces, you cannot rush the adaptation period of the spine, as the body accepts structural change at its own rate. The adjustments are not painful; they actually feel good, and give a true sense of pressure relief in the back. In addition to the adjustments to my spine, my brother prescribed specific exercises for only side of my body to correct the muscle imbalance that had developed from my years of caddying.

Since I have run over 60,000 miles in my life; biked over 150,000 miles; continue to run road races; race mountain bikes; kayak; and abuse my body much more than when I was teenager, I am checked and treated chiropractically one or more times per week, even when I feel perfect. Thanks to healthy eating, exercise and maintenance of my spinal condition, I have never missed a day of work in 22 years. In the winter months, I maintain a 50-hour work week, run 20-30 miles and bike 120 miles per week.

As a positive side effect of having my spinal condition corrected originally, I noticed I had more energy. In fact, research has proven that 20 mm of Hg pressure upon a spinal nerve reduces 60 percent of the energy transmitted through the nerve. This means that when the small weight of a quarter is placed upon a spinal nerve, that small amount of pressure reduces the overall quality and quantity of that nerve impulse. Since nerve pressure in the spine is directly related to organ function, the body functions more efficiently and has greater resistance when nerve function is restored. When you have a normal functioning nervous system and your cells replicate, the new cells are stronger and have greater resistance to disease.

You had a question regarding treating heavy patients, and whether this was stressful for a doctor of chiropractic. I do have some friends within the profession who are unable to practice chiropractic anymore because of the mechanical stress of treating patients for 20 years. Each of these doctors, however, did not exercise, stretch or maintain optimum health; therefore, they were

more prone to injury. In addition, each of them was considered overweight by any standard. Since my first day in practice, I have continued to lift weights, stretch and practice good biomechanical skills when treating patients, and I have found it is much easier to treat heavier patients than lighter ones. When moving a weight, gravity can actually become your friend, once you get a large weight moving in a specific direction. Chiropractic utilizes levers, fulcrums and the laws of physics, whether treating large or small patients. Skinny, bony patients with tight muscles are actually more difficult to treat than large, physically unfit patients. The largest patient I have ever treated was 408 pounds, and she was quite easy to treat.

You asked me what I liked the most about sports chiropractic. The easy answer is that 80 percent of my patients are runners, bikers, or both. Since I share these interests with them, I feel my patients are my friends. Having this camaraderie is quite enjoyable. Moreover, even patients who aren't athletic are usually interested in natural health, rather than covering up symptoms with drugs or painkillers. I can relate to them on this level, too.

If you love to run, you will appreciate chiropractic, because most runners understand and appreciate a properly functioning musculoskeletal system. They tend to monitor the body more closely than the average person. If something is not right, they will be able to relate that information to you more efficiently than a relatively nonathletic person. However, chiropractic truly is for everyone. It's never too late to have your spine and nervous system checked. Whether you have a neck or back pain; heel spur; knee pain; shoulder pain; headache; or just need an overall tune-up, the drugless profession of chiropractic may be your best hope for true structural correction.

I hope this information helps. Welcome to chiropractic!

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Editor's note: When not treating patients, Dr. Batchelor enjoys running and cycling. He was the number-one-ranked mountain bike duathlete in Atlanta from 1996-2000. He has been a consultant for *Runners World*; *Running in Georgia*; *Running Journal*; *Georgia Runner*; and *Run and See Georgia* magazines. He has won over 350 road races, run over 60,000 miles and treated over 100,000 patients for a variety of conditions. Recently, he was interviewed on CNN Headline News as an expert on athletic injury and back pain.

MARCH 2003