

Multisport Athlete in Pain

Daniel Batchelor, DC

The following is an e-mail I received from a potential patient, and my advice to him:

Dear Dr. Batchelor,

As an avid multisport athlete like yourself, I have always enjoyed biking; running; hiking; swimming; kayaking; etc. It's what I live for; when I can't have it, the quality of my life suffers dramatically.

I recently lost my job, and planned on taking advantage of the temporary time off and get in really great physical condition. However, a severe pain in my neck has prevented me from doing just about anything physically except walking. One month ago, my business was sold and I had to carry heavy boxes down several flights of stairs. The next morning, I woke up with a terrible pain in the left side of my neck. The pain starts when I get out of bed in the morning and gets worse the more I use it. In the past, if I had a pain, it would decrease later in the day as my muscles loosened up. This pain just gets worse as the day goes on.

I went to my general doctor; he gave me a strong muscle-relaxer, but all that did was make me tired, dizzy and sick to my stomach. He told me that if I still had pain after two to four weeks, I should consult a chiropractor, because I probably had a pinched nerve in my neck. He also told me I had scoliosis, so I might be more predisposed to pinched-nerve conditions. Well, it's been a month and I'm still in pain!

A while back, you helped my wife when she injured her lower back from running on uneven pavement. She had lower back pain and sciatica, and you solved her problem very quickly. She recommended I seek out your services for my neck pain.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would need the services of a chiropractor, but here I am, in need of your help. How long will it take to straighten me out?

Hope you can help me soon!

Cecil Mayer

Dear Cecil,

First, let's start out with a simple overview of the structure of your neck. There are seven vertebrae in your cervical spine (neck). Between each vertebra are small holes where nerves exit from the spinal cord out to the rest of the body. The nerves control your muscles and your organs. When one or more vertebra rotate or wedge more than approximately three degrees out of their normal alignment, one or more nerves can become pinched or irritated.

Since your pain has not improved on its own, you have one of two conditions: a ligament sprain or a cervical subluxation (pinched nerve) in your neck. A sprain is easy to treat using physiotherapy and immobilization. At your visit, I'll locate the point of misalignment (subluxation) and using specific nonsurgical methods, either by instrument or by hand, realign these vertebrae. If the condition is acute and in spasm, we'll use physiotherapy, electrical acupuncture, traction or iontophoresis first, to reduce the pain and spasm.

Your scoliosis also may have contributed to the condition in your neck. If a spinal curvature exists, the structure is not as strong as when no abnormal curvature exists. There are specific one-sided exercises you should perform if you have a functional scoliosis (acquired after birth). If you have a structural scoliosis (congenital), you should be prescribed gradually thickening heel lifts on the short-leg side (one shoe only) in 1/16" increments. This allows your body to gradually shift itself back into normal alignment so that the plumb line (center of gravity) falls from the center of the skull to the center between your feet.

To determine how long it will take to eliminate your pain, we'll have to identify the exact cause of your condition and what phase of degeneration your spine is in. It will take about 30 minutes to examine you and to analyze an X-ray of your cervical spine. Once we arrive at a diagnosis, you'll be treated immediately.

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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 won over 350 road races, run over 60,000 miles and treated over 100,000 patients for a variety of conditions. Dr. Batchelor has been a consultant for a number of magazines, including *Runners World*; *Running in Georgia*; *Running Journal*; *Georgia Runner*; and *Run and See Georgia*, and has been interviewed on CNN Headline News as an expert on athletic injury and back pain.

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