

Chiropractor

Professional Activities

Chiropractors, also known as doctors of chiropractic or chiropractic physicians, diagnose and treat patients whose health problems are associated with the body's muscular, nervous, and skeletal systems, especially the spine. Chiropractors believe interference with these systems impairs normal functions and lowers resistance to disease. They also hold that spinal or vertebral dysfunction alters many important body functions by affecting the nervous system, and that skeletal imbalance through joint or articular dysfunction, especially in the spine, can cause pain.

The chiropractic approach to healthcare is holistic, stressing the patient's overall health and wellness. It recognizes that many factors affect health, including exercise, diet, rest, environment, and heredity. Chiropractors provide natural, drugless, nonsurgical health treatments, and rely on the body's inherent recuperative abilities. They also recommend lifestyle changes -- in eating, exercise, and sleeping habits, for example -- to their patients. When appropriate, chiropractors consult with and refer patients to other health practitioners.

Like other health practitioners, chiropractors follow a standard routine to secure the information needed for diagnosis and treatment. They take the patient's medical history, conduct physical, neurological, and orthopedic examinations, and may order laboratory tests. X rays and other diagnostic images are important tools because of the emphasis on the spine and its proper function. Chiropractors also employ a postural and spinal analysis common to chiropractic diagnosis.

In cases in which difficulties can be traced to involvement of musculoskeletal structures, chiropractors manually adjust the spinal column. Some chiropractors use water, light, massage, ultrasound, electric, and heat therapy. They also may apply supports such as straps, tapes, and braces. Chiropractors counsel patients about wellness concepts such as nutrition, exercise, lifestyle changes, and stress management, but do not prescribe drugs or perform surgery.

Some chiropractors specialize in sports injuries, neurology, orthopedics, pediatrics, nutrition, internal disorders, or diagnostic imaging.

Many chiropractors are solo or group practitioners who also have the administrative responsibilities of running a practice. In larger offices, chiropractors delegate these tasks to office managers and chiropractic assistants. Chiropractors in private practice are responsible for developing a patient base, hiring employees, and keeping records.

Chiropractors work in clean, comfortable offices. Like other health practitioners, chiropractors are sometimes on their feet for long periods. Chiropractors who take X rays must employ appropriate precautions against the dangers of repeated exposure to radiation.

Chiropractors work, on average, about 40 hours per week, although longer hours are not uncommon. Solo practitioners set their own hours but may work evenings or weekends to accommodate patients. Like other healthcare practitioners, chiropractors in a group practice will sometimes be on call or treat patients of other chiropractors in the group.

Educational Requirements

Chiropractors must be licensed, which requires 2 to 4 years of undergraduate education, the completion of a 4-year chiropractic college course, and passing scores on national and State examinations.

Applicants must have at least 90 semester hours of undergraduate study leading toward a bachelor's degree, including courses in English, the social sciences or humanities, organic and inorganic chemistry, biology, physics, and psychology. Many applicants have a bachelor's degree, which may eventually become the minimum entry requirement. Several chiropractic colleges offer prechiropractic study, as well as a bachelor's degree program. Recognition of prechiropractic education offered by chiropractic colleges varies among the States.

Chiropractic programs require a minimum of 4,200 hours of combined classroom, laboratory, and clinical experience. During the first 2 years, most chiropractic programs emphasize classroom and laboratory work in sciences such as anatomy, physiology, public health, microbiology, pathology, and biochemistry. The last 2 years focus on courses in manipulation and spinal adjustment and provide clinical experience in physical and laboratory diagnosis, neurology, orthopedics, geriatrics, physiotherapy, and nutrition. Chiropractic programs and institutions grant the degree of Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.).

Chiropractic colleges also offer postdoctoral training in orthopedics, neurology, sports injuries, nutrition, rehabilitation, radiology, industrial consulting, family practice, pediatrics, and applied chiropractic sciences. Once such training is complete, chiropractors may take specialty exams leading to “diplomate” status in a given specialty. Exams are administered by chiropractic specialty boards.

All States and the District of Columbia regulate the practice of chiropractic and grant licenses to chiropractors who meet the educational and examination requirements established by the State. Chiropractors can practice only in States where they are licensed. Some States have agreements permitting chiropractors licensed in one State to obtain a license in another without further examination, provided that their educational, examination, and practice credentials meet State specifications.

Most State licensing boards require at least 2 years of undergraduate education, but an increasing number are requiring a 4-year bachelor's degree. All boards require the completion of a 4-year program at an accredited chiropractic college leading to the Doctor of Chiropractic degree.

For licensure, most State boards recognize either all or part of the four-part test administered by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners. State examinations may supplement the National Board tests, depending on State requirements. All States except New Jersey require the completion of a specified number of hours of continuing education each year in order to maintain licensure. Chiropractic associations and accredited chiropractic programs and institutions offer continuing education programs.

Academic Programs

[Lewis University](#)

[National University of Health Sciences](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

Projected job growth stems from increasing consumer demand for alternative healthcare. Because chiropractors emphasize the importance of healthy lifestyles and do not prescribe drugs or perform surgery, chiropractic care is appealing to many health-conscious Americans. Chiropractic treatment of the back, neck,

extremities, and joints has become more accepted as a result of research and changing attitudes about alternative, noninvasive healthcare practices. Chiropractors who specialize in pediatric care will be in demand as chiropractic spinal treatment is very gentle and children enjoy subsequent visits. The rapidly expanding older population, with its increased likelihood of mechanical and structural problems, also will increase demand for chiropractors.

Demand for chiropractic treatment, however, is related to the ability of patients to pay, either directly or through health insurance. Although more insurance plans now cover chiropractic services, the extent of such coverage varies among plans. Chiropractors must educate communities about the benefits of chiropractic care in order to establish a successful practice.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$17.01	\$34.00	\$66.32
	Annual	\$37,400	\$75,000	\$128,750
Illinois	Hourly	\$15.96	\$31.11	\$88.70
	Annual	\$37,440	\$55,660	\$184,500

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Chiropractors	51,100	53,400	5%	1,400
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2018	2028		
Chiropractors	2,160	2,120	-2%	50

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

American Chiropractic Association (acatoday.org)

International Chiropractors Association (chiropractic.org)

World Chiropractic Alliance (worldchiropracticalliance.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/chiropractors.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/29-1011.00>)

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