Family Chiropractic

Courtesy of Harbourfront Family Chiropractic
by Dr. Warren Gage

What is a "pinched" nerve?

The term "pinched" nerve is really a misnomer. To understand why, you need to know about "motion segments" in the spine.

A "motion segment" is made up of two adjacent vertebrae (bones), the disc that acts as a shock absorber between them, and the muscles and ligaments that keep them together. Nerves that carry communication signals between the brain and the body exit the spinal cord from each motion segment. If either vertebra in a motion segment is out of place, or turned even slightly from its proper position, pressure can be exerted on the nerve trunk. So what is commonly referred to as a "pinched" nerve is really a displaced vertebra.

What causes a bone in the spinal column to become out of place? Well, displacement can occur as the result of a fall, an accident, an injury, a repetitive movement (heavy lifting on the job), staying in the same position for a long time (working at a computer all day) or sudden twists and stress.

Each nerve root is made up of millions of little fibers (like telephone cable) that extend from both sides of the spinal column, above and below each vertebra. When a vertebra moves out of its normal position even slightly, pressure on a nerve root affects nerve impulses that go out to different parts of the body.

The symptoms of vertebral pressure on a nerve root include pain, a burning sensation, tingling or numbness down one side of your body, perhaps in your arm or leg. You might also experience headaches, stomach or intestinal problems, sciatica, a stiff neck, insomnia, asthma, allergies, or any number of illnesses as a result of nerve interference caused by the displaced vertebra.

Chiropractors are trained to identify these areas of "displacement," which we call *subluxations*. Once we locate the affected area, we removed the nervous system inference by using a very specific adjustment. This takes the pressure off the affected nerves, so that they can re-establish proper communication throughout the body, allowing health and healing to take place.