



Chiropractic Newsletter

Discover Chiropractic

Infant Sleep and Chiropractic

Most new parents struggle when their baby is unsettled. It's hard enough to adapt and care for a tiny human, but it takes an immense amount of energy and patience when that baby is uncomfortable and unwell. As a chiropractor, I know that chiropractic care can go a long way in helping with this process, but how does it work?

A newborn baby grows at a rapid rate; this means that all its focus is directed toward feeding, digesting, and sleeping. Humans rely on the parasympathetic nervous system (a part of the autonomic nervous system) to shift their body into a “rest and digest” state. When the main purpose of your body is to grow and adapt— as it is for babies—you really need your parasympathetic nervous system to work properly. When there is interference to this part of the nervous system, an infant will be in a state of “fight or flight,” which means that the baby's nervous system will believe it's in a constant state of danger...not an ideal time for digesting and sleeping! Infants

that struggle with the parasympathetic nervous system's function will only be able to sleep for short periods— and even then, their sleep will not be very deep. They might have an overactive fright response, and their digestion will be altered and inefficient.

How Chiropractic Can Help

Chiropractors assess the intricate functioning of the skull and spine and its relation to the central nervous system. Interference to the movement of the skull or vertebrae at specific points causes interference in the nervous system and will inhibit its function. We call these restrictions vertebral subluxations. The parasympathetic nervous system is mostly



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housed in the skull, upper neck, and pelvis. It is common to find subluxations in these parts of the body; they lead to an increased fight-or-flight response, and thus to an unsettled baby. These subluxations are often due to intra-uterine constraint or physical stress during the birth process.

Chiropractors use light fingertip pressure to remove these interferences, allowing the body to function as it should. Even after years of practice, I am still constantly surprised by the small amount of input it requires to change a screaming and unhappy infant into a relaxed and happy one. To clarify, I am not pressing on special sleeping and eating “buttons,” but am instead removing the interference inhibiting the baby to do those natural and normal things.

Research has shown the effectiveness of chiropractic adjustments on irritable infants. And the beauty is that chiropractic care is natural and drug-free, and a settled child will be able to grow and develop in a much more natural fashion. One long-term study showed that children who were under chiropractic care as infants tended to

have fewer temper tantrums and decreased frequency of waking at night 2 to 3 years later. That’s a sure sign of a functional nervous system!

The longer we live with these restrictions in our nervous systems and bodies, the more compensatory patterns are created in us. A child might become used to abnormal sleeping patterns and because of the inefficient digestion, her gut microflora might change. It usually takes adults a lot longer to get better because their nervous systems are so ingrained with compensatory patterns. That is part of the reason we really enjoy taking care of children— we know how much better their lives will be because of it! The sooner we can help these infants toward normal health, the better it will be for them in the long run.

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