



Chiropractic Newsletter

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The Body Adapts

Regardless of what we do, our bodies will continue to adapt. Leave a plant in a stationary position and it will grow predictably towards the window. This isn't wrong, it's not a condition, and it doesn't warrant a diagnosis. It's a perfect example of that plant adapting to its environment.

If there is one thing that humans are really good at, it's adaptation. We are certainly not unique in our ability to adapt to our environment compared to living organisms, but we might be the best at it. We've kind of mastered it. Our ability to adapt has landed us at the top of the hierarchy, quite literally able to live and thrive almost anywhere on this planet. Where we can't adapt, we employ a neat trick called consciousness and intellect to shape and tame our environment, which expands our adaptability beyond our own intrinsic qualities. Despite this amazing capacity, this seemingly miraculous ability to adapt to our condition, we have a tendency to label such adaptations as a condition, a malady, a diagnosis.

Conditions are, well, conditional. They are dependent on the myriad of factors we are subjected to, including physical factors, chemical factors, and emotional factors. Our current condition is the net result of all the circumstances we have been exposed to throughout our life and right up to the present. We've all experienced adaptation throughout our lives. If we are subjected to a physical factor in the form of a trauma, like falling off your bicycle, your body will have to adapt to that injury. What about the physical factor of sitting, all day, every day, when perhaps we are structurally supposed to be standing? What about the physical changes that occur throughout pregnancy? I bring this example up because pregnancy is perhaps the most perfect example of the brilliance of human adaptability. Everything from conception to hormonal changes to the wonder that is birth demonstrates that the body is really good at adapting. Like amazingly good. Yet, so often those adaptations are viewed through the lens of something having gone wrong. Difficulty with conception? Something is wrong. Low back pain in third trimester? Something is wrong. Baby is in a breech position? Something is wrong. Labor isn't starting or isn't progressing? There must be something wrong, right?

We, people I mean, love to find what's wrong. We can learn from our mistakes, so it serves a purpose, but we can also get carried away. Allopathic medicine is a good example. While a diagnosis, the name we give a constellation of symptoms, can serve us in research and treatments, it loses sight that ALL of those changes are simply the body adapting to its condition, intentionally, brilliantly.

Hearing over and over that our body has a problem, a condition, a diagnosis, and not that our body is adapting quite predictably to our circumstances starts to take a toll. Remember I mentioned physical, chemical, and emotional factors? Hearing that what we are experiencing is a wrongness rather than a rightness tends to affect our emotional and even chemical response. If we go back to our example of pregnancy, this can be especially nefarious. Undermining trust in the body at a time when we could be focusing on strengthening that trust will have a tremendous impact on birth and birth outcomes. I have never given birth myself, but I have been privileged to witness my wife deliver our four children at home. I can tell you with complete certainty that strength, determination, empowerment, and most importantly trust, are paramount.

Most of the families that consider home birth or birth center births are looking to put themselves in a situation where they can feel empowered and supported to accomplish the complex task of birth. Perhaps they are motivated by avoiding intervention, perhaps they are fearful of a hospital setting, or perhaps they don't want their pregnancy and birth to be treated like a condition. Regardless of the motivation behind pregnancy birth choices, the act of birth and the adaptation required to accomplish that task still need to occur. So, how can we improve our adaptability, especially during pregnancy? I'm glad you asked; let's explore.

The world and all of its factors, physical, chemical, and emotional, are happening all around us externally, all the time. Those factors impact us internally based on how we interpret and respond to them. The main system that facilitates this process is the nervous system. Take any physical factor that we are exposed to whether it causes pain or pleasure, we feel it, respond to it biochemically,

and it makes us feel a certain way emotionally. All of that is coordinated through the nervous system. Let's flip it around a little bit. Take any chemical factor we are exposed to, good or bad, we respond to it, we feel it, and it makes us feel a certain way. How about emotional factors or stressors? Same thing, it makes us feel a certain way, we respond to it biochemical-ly, and we can feel it physically. Think about an emotional challenge you've been through. That absolutely affected your biochemistry and how you felt physically.

Minimizing physical, chemical, and emotional stressors is a logical approach to facilitate a higher state of wellness or well-being, but what if we could increase our capacity to adapt to those stressors? To do that, we would need to focus on strengthening the functional capacity of the nervous system itself. Stimulating the nervous system in specific ways can have a direct impact on the state we find ourselves in, or something researchers refer to as "sense of coherence." Without getting into the technical components that make up one's sense of coherence, it revolves around how we feel in our own bodies and how we relate to our environments. Those with a higher sense of coherence are more resilient to daily stressors and tend to improve their health.

It should come as no surprise that those with higher sense of coherence also have an improved quality of life.

Interestingly, this is a two-way street, so incorporating simple activities that improve quality of life also improves one's sense of coherence. Things like exercising, eating healthy, and meditating or praying have long been known to improve sense of coherence. More recently, breathing exercises, specifically prolonged exhalations, will activate the vagus nerve and improve sense of coherence by affecting the nervous system indirectly. Chiropractic care takes a much more deliberate approach by affecting the nervous system directly. A 2018 study by the ICPA found that pregnant women who were under chiropractic care showed measurable improvements to their quality of life and therefore sense of coherence.

The implications of these findings are exciting because we know how important of a predictor a high sense of coherence is for birth outcomes. Everything from better perceived couple relationships, and natural spontaneous childbirth to higher birth satisfaction,

less or no use of epidural, and less complicated deliveries occur with a higher sense of coherence. These are self-evident clinical findings that thousands of perinatal chiropractors have seen in practice. Not to mention the hundreds of thousands of individuals who have experienced it for themselves in their own pregnancies while under chiropractic care. This gives us a roadmap to hopefully improve maternal well-being from what amounts to a pretty embarrassing record in the United States to something that we all can be proud of, and excited about.

Enhancing adaptability of the nervous system isn't hard to do, but it does require us as individuals to do it. Regardless of what we do, our bodies will continue to adapt. Leave a plant in a stationary position and it will grow predictably towards the window. This isn't wrong, it's not a condition, and it doesn't warrant a diagnosis. It's a perfect example of that plant adapting to its environment. The simple intervention would be to adjust the position of that plant to facilitate beautiful, resilient growth. This is precisely what chiropractic offers, to achieve improved adaptability, quality of life, and sense of coherence.

-Justin Ohm, DC

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