

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Peter Hobson & Dr. Yaron Robinstein

Vacation for the Health of It!

Whether it's a budget-friendly camping expedition to a local state park or an extravagant excursion to a sultry, tropical paradise, vacations are about more than just geography. They are about finding time to reconnect with family, friends and your inner self.

But that's not all. Vacations are of specific interest in health research (*J Travel Med* 2005;12:94-101). More and more scientists are realizing the numerous physical and emotional benefits associated with these brief respites.

Whether you have two days — or two weeks — your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic advocates regular vacations because they reduce stress, enhance immune function and improve mental outlook.

That's why your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic embraces "getting away from it all" as part of the **chiropractic lifestyle**: a philosophy that focuses on preventing disease by maintaining optimal spinal health, proper nutrition, exercise and stress reduction.

For more on the health benefits associated with vacations, sit back, put your

feet up and read on!

Reduce Burnout

Burnout syndrome, according to an article published in an issue of *Current Opinion in Critical Care*, is defined as a "psychological state resulting from prolonged exposure to job stressors." Job stressors include deadlines, grumpy bosses and office politics (*Curr Opin Crit Care* 2007;13:482-8).

Some on-the-job stress is natural, and even healthy. However, when "grumpy" becomes emotional abuse — and work-related stress starts spilling over into the rest of your life — a career reevaluation may be essential.

If you are feeling burned out, avoid making any snap decisions. Instead, get away for a few days and consider your options. If you decide to remain in your current job, identify ways to change your physical and emotional reactions to the stress around you.

Derail Depression

Depression is one of the most prevalent health problems in occupational settings. And your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic warns that emotional depression often goes hand-in-hand with physical ailments. Fortunately, researchers note that "vacation has become recognized as one of the important candidates for alleviating psychological problems in the workplace." (*J UOEH* 1999;21:289-307.)



Based on questionnaire responses from 357 office workers, scholars discovered that "decrease of leisure vacation chances was correlated with the presence of depression, and depression contributed to an increase in the absence from work."

Another way to beat depression is to spend your vacation helping others. CheapTickets.com and United Way of America launched a Web site designed to help travelers plan and book vacations where they can take part in volunteer projects. Access their website at www.unitedway.org. Their website has interactive tools that allows you to search for a cause-specific volunteer opportunity.

Hasten Happiness

The wellness benefits associated with taking a vacation don't cease the minute you return home, according to researchers from Austria's University of Vienna. Fifty-three employees of a medium-sized aluminum hardware manufacturer (16 women, 37 men) had less physical complaints and improved sleep quality and mood "as compared to before vacation" three days after returning back to work.



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But here's the best part: "Five weeks after vacation, subjects still reported less physical complaints than before vacation. The experienced recuperation during vacation explained 56 percent of the variance regarding the change of well-being." Based on this study, the researchers concluded that "vacation may improve well-being on a short term basis." (*Occup Med (Lond)* 2000;50:167-72.)

Whether your vacation was idyllically happy — or a frazzled nightmare — can make all the difference, however, when it comes to returning to pre-vacation burnout levels. In a study of 76 workers, researchers noted that "those satisfied with their vacations ... experienced greater relief." (*J Appl Psychol* 1997;82:516-27.)

The lesson here? If you are debating between a potentially depressing high school reunion or a sun-filled week snorkeling, opt for the lower-stress adventure! And take plenty of pictures to decorate your office with when you return to work. These subtle visual reminders dramatically affect mood.

Boost Your Confidence

White-water rafting, rock climbing, panning for gold and other exploratory outings are a great way to tap into your inner adventurer! New or thrilling activities heighten the senses, increase confidence and boost endorphin levels: the body's all-natural "feel good" hormones.

But before you strap on a parachute



— or embark on some equally adventurous pursuit — talk to your doctor of chiropractic first. Your doctor will give you tips on ways to minimize the likelihood of injury.

Ward Off Other Health Concerns

Simply jumping off the stress carousel may be enough to stop what's eating you or, to be more precise, what's eating holes in your intestines. Vacations can also help lower blood pressure. And since heart disease, obesity and sleep disorders are similarly linked to stress, a change of scenery may be *just* what the doctor ordered!

What Factors Make Vacations Healthy?

What factors specifically account for the refreshingly recuperative powers of vacation? According to a study involving 191 office workers, the answers include:

- 📅 Free time for one's self
- 📅 Warmer (and sunnier) vacation locations
- 📅 The opportunity to get in some exercise
- 📅 Plenty of restful, rejuvenating sleep
- 📅 Making new acquaintances

The researchers also noted that health-related vacation outcomes are "significantly affected by the way an individual organizes his or her vacation." (*J Travel Med* 2005;12:94-101.)

So, when planning your next time off, be sure to incorporate as many of the above wellness-boosting factors as possible!

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Vacation Tips

📅 **Plan ahead.** Nothing is more stressful than trying to book last-minute flights, hotel rooms and car rentals. If scheduling ahead isn't possible, consider hiring a travel agent to handle all of the details for you. And don't forget to include the entire family in the decision process.

📅 **Don't stress-out youngsters.** Overextended children can turn a dream vacation into a stress-filled nightmare. Consider the ages of your little ones and their activity levels when planning outings. Choose realistic goals accordingly. Avoid over-stimulating children with too many choices. Take along plenty of coloring books, crayons and other activities to pass travel time. Strive to maintain at least one or two of their "at home" routines, such as bedtime and snack selection.

📅 **Fly smart.** If your vacation involves flying, be sure to stay hydrated and move around as much as possible during your flight to maximize leg circulation. When the seatbelt sign is off, get up frequently and stretch. And avoid long layovers and "red-eye" schedules whenever possible.

📅 **Consider your budget.** Anxiety over every nickel and dime can ruin a vacation. First, prepare a realistic budget ... then decide where to go and for how long. Remember, a vacation does not need to involve lengthy travel in order to be relaxing. You might be surprised by the wealth of fun-filled and budget-friendly vacation opportunities close to you — if you take the time to look for them! Start by asking friends, family, co-workers and other acquaintances for suggestions.

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Celebrate Without Stress

“’Tis the season to be jolly ...” — and stressed. Unfortunately, the holiday season, with its overflowing to-do lists, often brings more stress than holiday cheer. The good news? Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic has some winning strategies to ward off holiday-related stress.



Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic witnesses the results of unchecked stress every day: from colds to headaches, digestive problems and low-back pain. Can't find a gift you purchased a month ago? Blame it on stress. It's an established fact that psychological stress can also spark memory loss (*Arch Gen Psychiatry* 1999;56:527-33).

In addition, researchers from the University of California recently noted a distinct rise in cardiac-related deaths on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 and cited holiday-related stress as one factor for the jump (*Circulation* 2004;110:3781-8). The following are just a few practical suggestions from your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic on how to slash holiday-related stress.

Pass on Perfection

There is no such thing as perfection.



So why ruin your holidays pursuing something that doesn't exist? Stop comparing yourself with magazines, television personalities or friends who seem to effortlessly concoct ideal festivities.

Instead of perfection, focus on fun and relaxation. For instance, a day focused on holiday perfection might involve hiding away in the kitchen cooking multiple batches of your famous “perfect” fudge for friends who would be just as pleased with store-bought — when you don't even enjoy cooking! Whereas a day focused on holiday fun might involve attending a show with a good friend or helping your children color holiday cards for a few close family members.

Be Realistic About the Relatives

The holidays are about celebrating the joys of family togetherness. But families, by their very nature, are imperfect. That's why your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic encourages patients to let go of the unrealistic expectations about the way the holidays *should* be.

It's normal to have the holidays punctuated by family drama. Just because the calendar says it's time to celebrate and be loving doesn't mean that it will actually happen.

Which is why guilt and depression are also normal this time of year. Often, couples may feel guilty about spending the holidays with one side of the family instead of the other. Missing loved ones who are absent due to mili-



tary service or other reasons may also generate depression.

To avoid holiday guilt, think compromise and consider creative solutions. In the above example, plan to alternate holidays with each side of the family, or host a joint celebration uniting both families. It's also OK to simply stay home some years and celebrate with only your immediate family. Remember, you can't please everyone all of the time. So give yourself permission *not* to stress out about it. Your health is more important.

Help Others to Heal

The holidays are a lonely time of year for people without loved ones in the area. If you don't have family members nearby, volunteer at area non-profit agencies. Helping others is one of the best mood lifters there is.

Tame Traditions

Traditions are magnificent. They are part of the fabric that weaves generations of family members together. But they can also become overwhelming. That's why it's important to select your holiday activities carefully, choosing only those that give you the greatest emotional returns.

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Cut Down on Kitchen Time

Cooking a holiday feast can take weeks of preparation and hours behind a hot stove. If you enjoy cooking, this may be relaxing. However, for most people, it is more a chore than a pleasure.

One option is to have your event catered. Depending on your menu, the cost may be comparable to what you ordinarily spend. Also consider pre-made items available at specialty groceries and delis.

Or, how about a potluck? To avoid ending up with 30 desserts and no main course, make a list and assign each guest a category — such as entrée, salad or dessert. You might also opt to provide the main course and have family members sign up for everything else. Either way, this option is a tremendous sanity saver, whether your celebration is at home or offsite.

Get a Handle on Holiday Cards

There are few things as stressful — and daunting — as several boxes of holiday cards waiting to be inscribed, addressed and mailed.

One way to tame this tradition is to order preprinted address and return labels. You can also tuck a photocopied note inside, highlighting the comings and goings of your family over the last year. If that seems a tad too impersonal, you can add a one- or two-line handwritten message to the note.

Of course, you can also opt to bypass the end-of-year card frenzy altogether or opt for New Year's cards or Valentines.

Be Picky About Parties

Here's another shocking fact about the holidays: You don't have to attend every party and holiday event, unless you want to.

Before you R.S.V.P., ask yourself the following questions:

- * Am I going because I want to or because I feel it's expected?

- * If I don't attend, will it have a negative impact on my job?
- * If I miss the party, will I miss an important family event?
- * What would I be doing if I did not attend the event? Is that more important?



Get a Grip on Gift Buying

Does your uncle still collect model cars? Does your nephew wear a large or extra-large shirt? And what exactly *do* fourth-grade girls think is fashionable?

To avoid having a holiday meltdown in the middle of your favorite department store, plan ahead by making a list of gifts and recipients and sticking to it. Take advantage of stores with free gift-wrapping services, or hire a neighbor's teenager to wrap your gifts for you. Also, consider giving gift certificates.

Another successful technique for slashing gift-shopping stress is to order online whenever possible. Many online retailers waive shipping fees at holiday time, especially if you place your order well in advance. And if you have the item shipped directly to the recipient, it will save you a trip to the post office!

Fend Off Financial Woes

Not having enough money to do all the things you'd like to do — or buy all of the things you'd like to buy —

can eradicate the joy of the season. It may be tempting to overload your credit cards in an effort to pretend to yourself, and others, that things are better than they truly are. But doing so will only add to the stress of the situation.

Instead, celebrate the love of family and friends. The following are just a few of the ways you can ease your holiday-related financial burdens:

- * Suggest that your family or group of friends rewrap gently or unused items and have a "white elephant" gift exchange, rather than buying new.
- * Initiate a "Holiday Fund" in January, setting aside a specific dollar amount each month.
- * If you have storage space, shop year-round and take advantage of sales. Make a running list of the gifts you have purchased and, just as importantly, where you have hidden them away!
- * Streamline gift giving if you have a large family by drawing names for a "secret buddy" exchange rather than purchasing gifts for everyone.
- * Make a budget and stick to it.
- * Make homemade gifts, such as crafts or baked goods.
- * Take advantage of after-holiday sales. Stock up on items you know you will need — such as gift wrap — so you won't be scrambling to pick them up (and paying full price) next November.

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Love Your Liver

The liver is a marvel. This miraculous organ filters more than a liter of blood each minute and works to detoxify the body of common contaminants, such as cigarette smoke, toxic chemicals, air pollutants, pesticides and drugs.

But that's not all. Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic reminds patients that the liver also assists with hormonal balance, fat regulation and digestion. It plays a central role in almost all body functions, such as converting food into necessary chemicals, storing certain vitamins, minerals and sugars, controlling the excretion of cholesterol and helping bolster immunity.

The liver removes toxins introduced to the bloodstream by changing them into products that are excreted through urine. The bottom line is that the liver is taxed to process all chemicals that enter the bloodstream, including non-prescription and prescription drugs.

Drugs and the Liver

Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic warns patients about the indiscriminate use of unnecessary medications. Even seemingly benign over-the-counter painkillers affect the liver. For example, high doses of acetaminophen, which is the active ingredient in the drug Tylenol®, cause liver cell death, especially when combined with alcohol. A three-year study looked at 308 patients with acute liver failure from 17 different liver-care centers. Acetaminophen accounted for 39 percent of cases.

“Eighty-three percent of our patients who developed acute liver failure had exceeded the daily maximum recommended dose of four grams,” noted the author Dr. William M. Lee (*Annals Internal Med* 2002;947-54).

Even recommended doses of certain drugs may incite liver problems. For example, the weight-loss supplement LipoKinetix is linked to liver failure. In one study, seven individuals developed liver inflammation after taking the popular weight-loss aid. One sub-

ject experienced liver failure. LipoKinetix contains a variety of stimulants, including yohimbine, norephedrine and caffeine (*Annals Internal Med* 2002;136:590-5).

Alcohol and the Liver

Although a glass of red wine per day is most likely beneficial to health, higher levels of alcohol may permanently injure liver cells.

Continual alcohol abuse is a common cause of hepatitis and cirrhosis. As inflammation and scar tissue replace normal tissue, blood flow through the liver is affected, making it difficult for the liver to carry out essential functions.

Some cases of cirrhosis advance to liver cancer.

The liver can handle only very limited amounts of alcohol. As a general rule, one alcoholic drink per day for women

and two per day for men is enough for the liver to manage. (Examples of a single alcoholic drink include a 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, a 5-ounce glass of wine or one 1.5-ounce glass of distilled spirits.) Of course, anyone who suffers from liver disease or alcoholism should avoid all alcohol.

Herbs and the Liver

Before taking any herbal remedies, check with your doctor of chiropractic. Some herbs or combinations of herbs are far from liver-friendly. For example, the herb comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) can wreak havoc on the liver. Comfrey contains chemicals called pyrrolizidine alkaloids, which may be poisonous to the liver. Comfrey is banned in Germany and Canada, but not in the United States. The herb is found in teas, cereals and herbal remedies.

Weight Problems and the Liver

You don't have to drink alcohol or use drugs to be at risk for liver disease. In recent years, rates of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) have jumped dramatically. Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic is extremely concerned about this alarming trend.

The accumulation of fat in liver cells causes NAFLD. The term “nonalcoholic” means that it occurs in individuals who drink little or no alcohol.

Incidence of NAFLD is skyrocketing, corresponding with the rise in obesity and diabetes. NAFLD affects both children and adults who are overweight or obese — who may or may not have diabetes and elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels. What's most frightening is that early-stage NAFLD rarely causes symptoms.



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NAFLD includes a wide spectrum of liver disease, ranging from simple fatty liver to nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). NASH is associated with liver-damaging inflammation. In some cases, progress may lead to either cirrhosis or liver cancer. Equally alarming, recent studies have linked NAFLD to an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease (*Diabet Med* 2007;24:1-6).

The best defense against NAFLD is a healthy diet and regular exercise — as well as maintaining a healthy weight, normal cholesterol and correct blood-sugar levels.

All-Natural Liver Support

Preventing liver disease is simple. Following are a few suggestions from the doctor, focusing on all-natural approaches to a healthy liver.

What to Avoid

Doctors of chiropractic encourage patients to avoid over-the-counter and prescription medication whenever possible. The liver is the primary clearinghouse for all drugs, so limit medication to those absolutely necessary.

In addition, it's vital to avoid illicit drugs, as well as excessive amounts of alcoholic beverages.

Amazing Avocados

Previous research suggests that a diet rich in avocados may ward off certain forms of cancer, including prostate cancer and breast cancer. Now, research indicates that avocados may also stave off liver disease.

In one study, scientists fed lab rats a potent liver toxin, followed by 22 different fruits. Of the fruits, avocados most effectively inhibited liver damage, as evidenced by changes in liver enzymes (*J Agric Food Chem* 2001;49:2215-21).

Awesome Apples

There are over 7,000 different varieties of apples grown throughout the

world. Yet despite their vast differences in appearance and taste, all share the same ability to protect against liver cancer.

And it's not just the interior white flesh that provides the benefit. The smooth red, yellow, orange or green skin may provide even more powerful anti-cancer properties. In one report, 50 milligrams of extract derived from apple skin inhibited liver cancer cells by 57 percent. The apple extract from the fruit's fleshy part inhibited the cancer cells by 40 percent (*Nature* 2000;405:903-4).



Superior Spice

Looking for a way to add spice to your life — and protect the liver? Go crazy for curry! Curcumin, the component of the curry spice turmeric responsible for its yellow pigment, may stave off alcohol-related liver disease.

A team of scientists studied four groups with six rats each. For four weeks, each group received either: 1) fish oil plus ethanol (grain alcohol), 2) fish oil plus dextrose (simple sugar), 3) ethanol plus curcumin or 4) dextrose plus curcumin.

Findings showed that the fish oil plus alcohol diet caused fatty liver, cell death and inflammation. Treatment with curcumin prevented these abnormal changes. In addition, curcumin inhibited the changes associated with the development of liver disease (*Am J Physiol Gastrointest Liver Physiol* 2003;284:321-27).

Commendable Coffee

That morning cup of java may do more than just jumpstart the day; it

may also protect against liver injury and lower the risk of liver cancer, according to several scientific studies.

One analysis determined that “overall, an increase in consumption of two cups of coffee per day was associated with a 43 percent reduced risk of liver cancer.” (*Gastroenterology* 2007;132:1740-5.)

Another long-term, large-scale study confirms these results. The 22-year analysis included 125,580 people whose medical history included alcohol use. Consuming just one cup of coffee each day slashed risks for alcohol-induced liver cirrhosis by more than 20 percent.

And, because the link appears to have nothing to do with caffeine, it doesn't matter whether you choose the “leaded” or “unleaded” version. “Tea consumption had no effect on the risk of alcohol-associated liver cirrhosis, making it likely that a component of coffee other than caffeine is responsible.” (*Arch Intern Med* 2006;166:1190-5.)

Miraculous Milk Thistle Extract

The milk thistle plant has purple to red flowers and shiny, pale green leaves. However, it's much more than just a pretty face. Research in rats suggests that its ripe seeds may provide protection for the liver (*Alcohol Clin Exp Res* 2006;30:407-13).

Remember never take any supplements without first consulting with the doctor.

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Preventing Skin Cancer

Sunlight is vital for the body's production of vitamin D. But too much sun — particularly as a child — can lead to skin cancer.

As a prevention specialist, Dr. Hobson knows that knowledge is a powerful weapon in the fight against disease. Therefore, Dr. Hobson keeps patients up to date on the best ways to prevent diseases, like skin cancer, before they start.

The following are just a few of the ways Dr. Hobson teaches patients to stay safe in the sun.



Why Worry About Sun Exposure in Winter?

Most people think about sun protection only during summer, but it's also important to remain conscious of sun exposure during the winter months.

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, UV rays reflecting off a snowy surface put facial skin and eyes at nearly twice the risk of sun damage.

Types of Skin Cancer

There are three basic forms of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. All three are linked to ultra-violet (UV) ray overexposure, both from the sun and tanning facilities.

UV light sparks molecular changes in skin that result in specific mutations deemed "critical to skin cancer devel-

opment." (*Recent Results Cancer Res* 2003;163:151-64.)

Earlier this year, the American Cancer Society (ACS) predicted 55,100 new cases of melanoma in 2004. In addition, the ACS projected more than a million new cases of basal cell and squamous cell cancers by the end of the year (www.cancer.org).

Basal Cell

The most common of the three skin cancers, basal cell tends to grow slowly and remain localized, as opposed to spreading. Generally found on areas of the body exposed to sunlight, it can range from a small, fleshy bump to a sore that bleeds, scabs and then repeats the cycle. Sometimes it masquerades as a red, sensitive, flat spot that bleeds easily.

Squamous

A hard lump with red or brown irregular borders is characteristic of squamous cell cancer. An ulcer that doesn't heal may develop within the lesion. This form of skin cancer is more common after the age of 60, following years of sun exposure.

Melanoma

Dark moles with irregular borders are hallmarks of melanoma. Itching, bleeding and changes in color are also associated with these moles. Unlike basal and squamous skin cancers, melanomas develop very quickly — often involving the lymphatic system — and are distinctly life-threatening. Melanomas are also linked to overexposure to the sun.

Start With Self-Exams

Lesions that don't heal, moles with irregular borders and other symptoms related to skin cancer aren't as easy to detect as you might think. Ears are one "hot spot." Another particularly tricky area of the body is the scalp.

It's important that parents do a periodic "scalp check" on youngsters and that spouses do the same for each other. Start by slowly moving the fingers through the hair and exposing every inch of scalp along the way. If something doesn't look right, don't panic. It may be just a bug bite or an irritated hair follicle. But do make a note of the area (size of the lesion/mole, color, etc.) and check again in a few weeks. If there's no change — or the area is more suspicious than before — contact a dermatologist.

To learn more about how to conduct a self-exam for the detection of skin cancer, go to the Skin Cancer Foundation's Web site at www.skincancer.org.



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Ten Ways to Reduce Holiday Stress

Frantic shopping, last-minute gift wrapping, planning multiple parties ...

The holiday season can be fun, but it can also be marked by over-commitments and stress. And, mental health experts warn that this year, holiday stress will be amplified due to the current financial crisis.

Doctors of chiropractic emphasize the connection between emotional stress and physical health. To help reduce anxiety and stay well this holiday season, your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic has compiled a list of 10 simple stress-busting tips. You'll be surprised by how easy it is to remain relaxed during the busiest month of the year.



Physical-Emotional Link

Did you know that emotional stress is linked to colds and flu as well as chronic diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, heart disease and depression? Chiropractors know that reducing stress boosts wellness.

That's why Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic instructs patients about the **chiropractic lifestyle**, which is a mode of living that emphasizes disease prevention through healthy choices. Keeping tabs on stress is a fundamental part of this lifestyle.

This way of life centers on respecting the connection between body, mind and spirit.

Watch for Early Signs

Your doctor at Hinterland Chiroprac-

tic urges patients to be aware of early signs of stress, such as irritability, fatigue, inability to relax or sleep, loss of appetite or feeling overwhelmed. Don't dismiss these alarm signals as "normal" feelings to be endured around the holidays.

Instead of wishing the holidays were over, take action. Consider the following 10 tips as a blueprint to a stress-free holiday.

❶ Check With the Doctor

Before the holidays get underway, make an appointment with your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic. Research

shows that chiropractic care reduces stress and enhances immune function.

What's more, chiropractic care eliminates spinal dysfunction associated with stress. A common malady, known as **vertebral subluxation**, may be sparked by emotional stress. Vertebral subluxation is a condition in which motion is limited in areas of the spine or spinal bones (vertebrae) are slightly out of place.

Your doctor at Hinterland Chiropractic uses **chiropractic adjustments**, specialized and gentle maneuvers, to correct vertebral subluxations and accompanying dysfunction.

❷ Maintain a Healthy Diet

Eating a healthy diet, low in sugar and unhealthy fats — and loaded with fresh fruit and vegetables — is a fantastic way to keep stress at bay.

How is eating nutritiously possible with the ubiquitous holiday parties and treats? It's not easy, but it can be done. For instance, limit tempting food favorites to just one treat per event.



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Design festive fruit trays for parties, instead of desserts. Prepare craft items, rather than baked goods, for hostess gifts. Opt to cook with olive oil instead of butter. Drink plenty of water and eat several healthy snacks throughout the day, especially before a holiday bash.

3 Exercise

Exercise is a proven stress-busting technique. Aerobic exercise literally reduces the production and effects of key stress hormones, such as cortisol.

This month, try creative ways to exercise, such as ice skating, walking the neighborhood to view holiday lights or dancing to holiday music. Aim for 60 minutes of aerobic activity each day.

Exercise outdoors whenever possible. Connecting with nature is a powerful stress buster. And, a little sunlight will lift your spirits and relieve stress, especially if you suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which is also known as winter depression. SAD is triggered by the loss of light during the winter months.

4 Avoid Holiday Debt

Decide how much you can spend before you shop — and stick to your budget. If you're overwhelmed with too many gifts to buy, consider starting a name exchange. Most likely others will appreciate a break as well!

If you're hosting a party, create a budget for food and decorations, or consider hosting a pot-luck. Simply gathering friends and family together is special enough. Spending a great deal of money doesn't mean it will be the perfect affair or that anyone will have a better time.

5 Stay Flexible

Are you disappointed when events, such as holidays, don't turn out as you have imagined? Many people have unrealistic expectations for the holidays, particularly how family members will interact. This is a major source of holiday-related stress.

Keep an open mind. For instance, if the plan is to drive around and check out holiday lights, but the weather or traffic interferes, adapt quickly without regret or worry. Gathering the family for songs around the fire may be just as fun.

6 Keep It Simple

Are you planning a five-course, gourmet meal for your extended family of 20? Unless you are among the rare group of people who consider cooking for large parties a form of stress relief, simplify meal planning. Focus on dishes that may be prepared ahead of time and reheated. And don't shy away from asking guests to bring a dish as well. Remember: Relaxed fun is more important than perfection.

7 Be Organized

Make a list and check it twice before you shop for groceries or gifts. Sticking to the list will dramatically reduce stress.

If you're planning to hit the road, compile a packing list on paper. Pack a couple days before your trip. If possible, load up the car the day prior to your departure. Plan that you'll run into some holiday traffic, so make sure that you have supplies needed to keep kids occupied. Allowing for extra time to travel will further cut down on your stress.

8 Start Early

Shop early for gifts to avoid lines and pandemonium at the malls. Or, better yet, shop online. Many companies offer free holiday shipping for orders placed well in advance. Also, consider purchasing gift cards for anyone on your list. Many supermarkets and drug stores sell gift cards to a vast array of stores.

If you're mailing gifts anywhere — from the next town to around the world — don't wait until the last minute. You'll save both money and stress.

9 Appreciate What You Have

Remember that the holidays come only once a year — and that each year is a gift. Take a moment to stop and smell the roses.

Appreciate the simple things that you may be taking for granted. Instead of rushing through wrapping the gifts, pop in some holiday music or a favorite DVD, and savor the process. Don't worry about having every gift perfectly boxed and wrapped. Instead, use gift bags whenever possible. Not only do they save time and frustration, but they may also be easily recycled.



10 Take a Break

Even Santa's elves get to take a break. If you've been working non-stop at a frenzied pace, take time out to do something you enjoy. It may mean adapting your plans a bit, but preventing stress-related illness should be a priority. Treat yourself to a massage, an hour alone with a good book or special dinner with a loved one.

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Presented by Dr Peter and Dr Yaron



What You Should Know About Automobile Air Bags

Global statistics support the overall benefit of air bags – when used properly. At some time, however, the chiropractic community wants patients to be aware of certain dangers associated with air bags – specifically injuries that affect the muscular-skeletal system. Dr Peter and Dr Yaron urges patients to use these life-saving devices, but to do so safely. Read on to learn how to do just that.

Air Bags No Excuse Not to Buckle Up

While air bags save lives, they are no substitute for seat belts. The two safety devices were designed to work in tandem.

Research shows that buckling up is more important than air bags for over-all safety. A massive study of all passenger vehicle crashes in the United States from 1990 through 2000, which included 51,031 driver-passenger pairs in the same vehicle, found that “air bags reduced the risk of death by about 8 percent, whereas seat belts reduced the risk of death by 65 percent”. (*Br Med* 2002; 324:1119)

All Air Bags Are Not Created Equal

Differences among air bag designs, according to the Insurance Institution for Highway Safety (IIHS), include deployment direction or path, crash sensor design/location, minimum deployment threshold, bag mounting location/folding pattern/shape, venting pattern and inflator output. “All of these design parameters influence air bag performance, which automakers and air bag suppliers are continuously working to optimise.” (IIHS)

How Do Your Air Bags Rate?

Consumers with vehicles sold in the US and Canada can visit www.highwaysafety.org and check out how their air bags measure up. The Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) offers Australians a similar rating program when they click on “motoring” at www.mynrma.com. And the National Agency for Automotive Safety and Victim’s Aid (NASVA) keeps drivers in Japan up to date on air bags at www.nasva.go.jp/english. Dr Peter and Dr Yaron encourages patients to investigate how their air bags rate.

Look for Side Air Bags Too

According to the IIHS, air bags that protect the chest and abdomen reduce deaths by 10 percent. Peripheral air bags with head protection, however, reduce deaths by 45 percent during side-door impact. “More than 9,000 people are killed in side crashes each year and head injuries are a leading cause of death.” (*Med Econ* 2003; 80:10)

Keep Your Distance

“Despite the overall protective effect of air bags, they can cause fatal and non-fatal injuries if the driver’s head, neck, chest or arms are too close to the deploying air bag.” (*Br J Ophthalmol* 2001; 85:640)

Drivers should have ten inches (25cm) of space between the centre of the steering column and their chest.

According to researchers in England, “Air bags have been advocated as a supplemental restraint system. However, their deployment can cause injury particularly if the driver is of stature, unrestrained or out of position within the vehicle.” (*Ann R Coll Surg Engl* 2004; 86:149-55)

Tilting the steering wheel down and raising the seat up will allow most drivers – even those under five feet, four inches – to “sit at least ten inches from the steering wheel and still drive comfortably. Some cars have telescoping steering wheels or (extended) foot pedals that can help with this”. (*Medical Update* 2000; 24:1)

Special Concerns for Kids

If a child is less than four feet tall, industry experts warn against letting him or her sit in the front seat of a car with air bags, even if these diminutive passengers are secured by a seat belt. The danger is especially great in older cars with “first-generation” side air bags.

Even the new side air bags pose a risk to children, according to the American Academy of Paediatrics. While these new devices improve safety for adults in side-impact crashes, improperly restrained children seated near a side air bag may be at risk for serious injury. On its website, the Academy urges parents to check their vehicle’s owner’s manual to see what it says about children and side air bags.

When to Disable an Air Bag

As a general rule, it is unlawful to disable an air bag. Governments do, however, make exceptions in rare cases when it may be safer for the drivers and passengers to have these devices deactivated.

Hands on the Wheel

Remember being taught in driver’s education class to keep your hands on the steering wheel at “ten” and “two”? Well, this standard position can result in broken wrists when air bags deploy. If you have an air bag, some experts advise positioning your hands at “nine” and “three” with thumbs resting on top of the wheel.

After reviewing the cases of 25,464 accident victims, researchers in Virginia concluded that “an analysis of the cases indicated that occupants exposed to an air bag deployment were statistically more likely to sustain a severe upper-extremity injury (like broken wrists) than most occupants not exposed to an air bag deployment”. (*Am J Emerg Med* 2003; 31:100-5)

The most dangerous hand position, however, appears to be an under-hand grasp of the wheel turned 90 degrees. This posture resulted in the highest number of injuries. (*Ann Proc Assoc Adv Automot Med* 2002; 46:45-62)

Eyes Are Vulnerable

Although air bags reduce deaths, they can also cause injury to the facial skeleton and the eye. (*Emerg Med J* 2003; 20:490)

Eye injuries related to air bags include corneal abrasion and laceration, retinal haemorrhage and retinal detachment.

When researchers from the Helsinki University Eye Hospital studied 300 eye-injury cases resulting from air bag deployment, they concluded that drivers and passengers have a 2.5 percent chance of having an eye injury. Of that number, only 0.4 percent is at risk of a severe eye injury if an air bag deploys. (*Optician* 2003:1)

The study also revealed that wearing glasses didn't increase injury and actually helped protect the eyes from air bag chemicals. German researchers recently noted that sodium azide and sodium hydroxide, both of which are dispersed upon deployment of an air bag, can cause chemical burns when they contact skin. (*J Craniomaxillofac Surg* 2004; 32:35-7)

There is one group, however, who is more vulnerable to air bag induced eye injury. Patients who have undergone radial keratotomy (RK) for the correction of moderate myopia are at an increased risk for corneal rupture. While RK is a probable risk factor for corneal rupture by air bag impact, serious injury is rare. (*Br J Ophthalmol* 2001; 85:640)

And, those who opt for the increasingly popular Laser-Assisted in Situ Keratomileusis (LASIK) vision-correction surgery are at an increased risk of air bag complications.

A Big Bang

The sound of an air bag deploying is often associated with that of a gun shot. Drivers and passengers experience diminished hearing that can last from a few hours to several days. (*Aca Otorhinolaryngol Balg* 2003; 57:177-81)

Post Deployment

If you or members of your family are involved in a motor vehicle accident, call our office immediately and schedule an appointment. As your partners in health, we will do everything we can to see you as soon as possible.

Blunt trauma to the thoracic (chest) area of the body can result in a myriad of injuries, including restriction or misalignment of spinal bones (vertebrae). This common condition, known as vertebral subluxation, is linked with a myriad of health concerns, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches, backaches, infantile colic and ear infections.

Chiropractors correct vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle manoeuvres called chiropractic adjustments.

The bottom line? Anyone involved in a car accident – particularly children – should have a complete chiropractic evaluation. Your doctor understands the traumas associated with various accident scenarios and restraining devices. A complete checkup will not only address immediate concerns, but also reduce the likelihood of future complications.

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Jet Lag Drag

You're tired, you're cranky and, to top it off, you have insomnia.

Welcome to the world of jet lag drag.

Jet lag is the body's way of letting you know it doesn't appreciate zipping through multiple time zones – particularly when its forced to do so in a cramped seat with no legroom. Breathing air of dubious quality and having your stomach roll with each pocket of turbulence doesn't help either.

One way to beat jet lag is to avoid flying. A more practical solution, however, is to let Dr Peter and Dr Yaron help you weather the ups and downs of air travel with sound advice and common sense remedies.

Dr Peter and Dr Yaron can also teach you how to sidestep many of jet lag's causes, in addition to coping with those that you can't avoid.

Spine Attack

If you're a frequent flyer, you know that airplane travel is a spine's worst nightmare. The human spine was not meant to be twisted into a pretzel, crammed into a too-small seat and rendered immobile for hours on end.

Quite often, flying results in areas of the spine becoming misaligned or restricted. This condition, known as a vertebral subluxation, is associated with an increased risk of headache, back pain and nerve-related disorders. Ongoing research also suggests that vertebral subluxations affect the immune system. Using a series of gentle movements, known as chiropractic adjustments, Dr Peter and Dr Yaron corrects vertebral subluxations and prevents their recurrence.

Dr Peter and Dr Yaron may also suggest a variety of exercises that may be performed in your seat during the flight, to minimise damage to your spine.

So, before you call your ticket agent to schedule your next flight, schedule an appointment for a chiropractic check-up.

A Drag, by Any Other Name, is Still a Drag

In scientific circles, it is termed circadian stischronism. Most people, however, know it by its common handle: jet lag.

Jet lag is characterised by fatigue, headache, weakness, irritability, memory difficulties, loss of concentration and gastronomical disturbances.

But what causes this phenomenon? According to scientists, the collection of maladies known as jet lag is due to “transient disassociation between the environmental (local time in the new time zone) and internal (body time due to the internal body clock) times. The body clock is slow to adjust to a change in habits.” (*The Lancel* 1997; 350:1611)

“Eastward travel is associated with worse disturbances than westward, perhaps because getting to sleep at bedtime at the destination is more difficult than premature waking. Several days may be needed for full recovery.” (*The Lancel* 1998; 352:626)

Why does eastward travel up the risk of jet lag?

According to an article in the Los Angeles Business Journal, “Our bodies are telling us they would really rather wake up an hour later – one time zone to the west – everyday. Flying westward, then, we can take advantage of this tendency to automatically offset the lag by the space of about one time zone. Flying east, on the other hand, your system inevitably adds that daily out-of-synch hour to the damage done.”

Brain Drain

A late-breaking study suggests that chronic jet lag may actually shrink your brain.

Kwangwook Cho, of the University of Bristol Medical School in England, found that flight attendants with chronic jet lag have higher stress hormone concentrations in their saliva and small temporal lobes than more rested attendants do. The temporal lobes are critical brain areas for processing short-term memory.

Cho took saliva samples and brain scans of healthy women in their twenties who had been employed by international airlines for five years. Their schedules had included flights crossing at least seven time zones, interspersed with short or long periods of flying within a single time zone.

“Half the women had fewer than five days between multi-zone flights and half had at least two week sessions of the shorter flights. The first group had higher saliva concentrations of the stress hormone cortisol, smaller temporal lobes and more difficulty in tests of short-term memory. Many studies have shown that high cortisol concentrations damage brain cells. If this is the case in jet lag, the shrinkage is permanent, says Cho.” (*Science News* 2001; 159:392)

Other studies link jet lag with elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol. For instance, salivary cortisol concentrations were significantly higher among airline flight attendants who had more than eight hours of jet lag per week, compared to that of airport check-in staff. (*The Lancel* 2000;355:1078)

Bolstered cortisol levels may trigger various mental and physical conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes and clinical anxiety.

Melatonin? Maybe

In the search for the ultimate jet lag remedy, countless travellers have turned to the hormone melatonin. Both supporters and detractors, however, have hotly debated its benefits.

Melatonin is the chief hormone secreted by the pineal gland of the brain. Although many frequent flyers and flight attendants swear by this remedy, research has yet to support its effectiveness.

For example, in a Columbia University study, 257 Norwegian physicians who were visiting New York for five days were randomly assigned to one of four regimens:

1. 0.5 milligrams of melatonin at bedtime;
2. 0.5 milligrams of melatonin on a shifting schedule;
3. 5 milligrams of melatonin at bedtime; or
4. a placebo ("dummy" pills).

"On their first day home, two-thirds of the physicians showed a marked increase in jet lag symptoms, with gradual improvement over the next five days. But none of the melatonin treatments eased symptoms better than a placebo." (*Environmental Nutrition* 1999; 22:7)

As with all supplementations, talk with your health-care provider before adding melatonin or any other substance to your wellness regime.

Beat jet lag with the following tips:

- Plan to arrive at your location several days early, if possible, to allow yourself to fully recover before business or sporting events.
- Drink plenty of water on board. Avoid alcohol (a diuretic) and coffee (a diuretic and source of caffeine).
- Avoid napping unless it coincides with the flight cycle of your destination (unless, of course, you have been deprived of sleep for a long period of time during transit).
- Pack earplugs, a CD player and eye mask (to black out light). Ask your chiropractor to recommend a neck-friendly inflatable pillow. If you do decide to nap, these accessories will allow you to do so in relative peace.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes that can easily be removed.
- Set your watch to the time zone of your destination, to help you start making the mental transition.
- Get plenty of sunshine once you have reached your final destination, to set your circadian clock to the new time.
- Snooze only when its bedtime and not because you are tired, and adjust your eating times as well.

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Health Tips for Air Travellers

Achy back, sore neck, sniffing nose, pounding head and relentless fatigue: the hallmarks of a just-debarked airplane passenger. Whether you're a frequent flyer or planning your first air excursion, you're susceptible to the physical stress of air travel. As a prevention specialist, Dr Peter and Dr Yaron helps patients prepare their bodies for air travel, and fend off flight related ailments.

Avert Ache with Adjustments

Visiting a chiropractor prior to your flight is key to a pain-free vacation or business trip. Sitting for hours in a cramped plane seat – and sleeping in a lumpy hotel bed – shift the spine's natural posture. This shift may aggravate a condition called vertebral subluxation – areas in the spine where movement is restricted or bones are out of alignment. This dysfunction is linked with a myriad of ailments, including neck pain, backache and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Dr Peter and Dr Yaron works to correct vertebral subluxations before the onset of symptoms. So, schedule a chiropractic check-up before taking off to keep your spine in top form while travelling. Regular chiropractic care supports optimal spinal health, preventing travel-related pain and fatigue.

The result: more productive and enjoyable journeys.

Pack Perfect Pillows

Stroll down the aisle of a plane after dark and you'll notice a wide variety of contoured sleep positions – postures that wreak havoc on a traveller's neck and back. But an in-air catnap doesn't have to leave you stiff and sore. To keep your spine aligned while you snooze, invest in a traveller's pillow. These U-shaped pillows cradle the spine, preventing the neck from slouching forward or to the side. (Ask your chiropractor to order a traveller's pillow for you or to recommend a reputable supplier.)

Speaking of pillows, Dr Peter and Dr Yaron also suggests bringing your pillow from home along when you travel. Hotel pillows are often rigid and bulky, and they don't allow for proper neck positioning.

Schedule Stretch Sessions

Frequent stretch breaks are a vital component of a healthy flight. Stretching wards off two flying related ailments: blood clots and muscle soreness.

Approximately one in every two million flyers suffer travel-induced blood clots (thrombosis) which are triggered by prolonged sitting. This number may seem low, but the incidences of this disorder is rocketing. Flight related blood clots are so widespread that in 1995 an international conference was held to discuss the problem, which is also known as “economy class syndrome”, “coach class thrombosis” and “traveller’s thrombosis”.

No matter what you call it, traveller’s thrombosis may have serious implications, including stroke and death. Blood clots usually form during long trips, with 76.5% of cases occurring after a flight lasting at least 12 hours (*Bull Acad Nat Med* 1999; 183:985-97). Traveller’s thrombosis is also more common in passengers with a history of cardiovascular disease.

Research indicates that stretching boosts circulation, which may inhibit the formation of blood clots. Stretching also wards off muscular soreness, another condition provoked by prolonged sitting. According to scientific research, stretching prevents the chemical reactions that create muscle ache.

Remind yourself to stretch by setting a watch alarm for 30 minute intervals. Every half-hour, promenade the aircraft’s aisles, and perform three to five minutes of stretching. (Ask Dr Peter and Dr Yaron to outline an on-board stretch routine.)

Launch an Antioxidant Attack

Air travel exposes flyers to cosmic radiation, which may create disease-causing free radicals and spur cellular changes associated with cancer. In one study, investigators poured over the medical records of 3,877 pilots and cockpit engineers. Cockpit crew members who flew more than 5,000 hours showed an elevated risk of myeloid leukaemia and skin cancer (*Lancet* 1999; 354:2029-31). Researchers also speculate that frequent flying may up the risk of prostate cancer.

In addition to radiation, recirculated airplane air – often teaming with fungus, viruses and bacteria – may also incite disease.

To ward off the hazards of cosmic radiation and recirculated air, fortify your body with natural immune boosters – antioxidants. Take extra antioxidant supplements (such as grape seed extract and vitamins A, C and E) during the two weeks prior to travel, and throughout your journey. (Ask your chiropractor about what doses are right for you.)

While in the air, suck on one of the new antioxidant lozenges available at most health food stores, or spritz your mouth with antioxidant oral spray once every three hours. One especially potent variety of lozenges and oral sprays, which is scheduled to hit the market soon, contains the antioxidant glutathione. A study presented at the Experimental Biology 2000 conference in Atlanta, Georgia, revealed that oral sprays containing glutathione inhibit the flu virus. Specifically, glutathione triggers a chemical reaction that deactivates the enzymes that allow the virus to invade cells in the mouth and throat.

“This could be very helpful, for example, if you were sitting next to someone with the flu on an airplane you could effectively block the infection for a period of several hours,” said Dr. Dean Jones, the study’s lead author.

Garlic is also a potent antioxidant and infection-blocker – but beware that fellow passengers may not appreciate the odiferous quality of your garlic feast!

Ditch Unnecessary Drugs

Alcohol and other drugs provoke jet lag, so skip the in-flight cocktail and avoid air-sickness medication or sleeping pills whenever possible. Instead, consider all-natural nausea remedies, such as ginger capsules and acupressure bracelets. For travel-related insomnia, try melatonin supplements, which help shift your “body clock” so its inline with your destination’s time zone. (As always, check with your chiropractor before initiating any supplement therapy.)

Bring Bottled Water

Adequate hydration deters jet lag, fatigue and illness. Pack a few bottles of spring water in your carry-on, and make sure to guzzle them down during your flight.

Be Finicky About Flight Fare

A prodigious number of scientific studies have verified the medicinal properties of wholesome foods, such as fruits, vegetables, soy, nuts, olive oil, whole grains and fish. In contrast, meals high in sugar, “white” grains, saturated fat and meats aggravate illness. So, request a special health-conscious meal when you book your excursion. Most airlines offer an array of healthy entrees, including vegetarian, low-fat and Mediterranean options. Or, carry a mini-cooler stocked with home cooked cuisine.

Take Some Tea

Tossing several bags of herbal tea into your attaché before boarding can provide many in-air health benefits. First, brews such as ginger, lemon and mint are renowned for their anti-air sickness properties. In addition, the heat of tea obliterates some viruses and bacteria on contact. Varieties such as green, ginger, rose hip and ginseng also contain immune-boosting antioxidants.

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Are You and Your Car a Perfect Fit?

Do you strain and stretch your right leg to reach the gas and brake pedals of your car? Are you scrunching down in your seat every time you need to look out of your vehicle's side mirrors? Does your back go into spasm every time you exit the driver's seat?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it's a safe bet that you aren't driving an ergonomically correct car.

The more time you spend behind the wheel, the more important it is to make sure you and your car are a perfect fit. Dr Peter and Dr Yaron can help you make this determination and work to correct postural imbalances caused by years of over-stretching, scrunching and twisting behind the wheel.

Consumers today are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits associated with ergonomic design. Consequently, automobile makers are responding with a variety of options, such as multi-position driver's seats that move horizontally and vertically. For instance, the new Lincoln Navigator has a power-adjustable pedal system that allows the accelerator and brake pedals to be moved forward or backward to suit the driver's dimensions.

During the design phase of an automobile, details mock-ups of the interior are built to study the design and evaluate ergonomic issues. Several designers have recently started using virtual-reality technology to gather needed data.

Ergo What?

How many times have you tried on a clothing item labelled "one size fits all" and actually had it fit? If you are like most people, not very often. That's because, as Dr Peter and Dr Yaron know from years of studying human physiology, no two people are exactly alike.

Ergonomics takes height, weight and various body proportions into account when considering the design of everything from office chairs to the placement of the accelerator pedal in a car. The primary objective of ergonomics is to make the machine serve the user – as opposed to the user serving the machine.

In the Driver's Seat

Poor car seat design can be hazardous to your spine by forcing you into improper postures. The spine is comprised of individual bones called vertebrae, each supported by an array of muscles and ligaments. Vertebral subluxation occurs when spinal movement is restricted or when vertebrae become misaligned. Vertebral subluxations are associated with a variety of health ailments including ear infection, headache, neck pain, back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Doctors of chiropractic correct these “hot spots” with gentle and safe manoeuvres called “chiropractic adjustments”.

If your car seat is not ergonomically correct, there are a number of products on the market to remedy the situation. Ask Dr Peter and Dr Yaron to recommend the right product for your specific needs.

Often, simply attaching a quality back support to the driver’s seat can put you on the fast track to ergonomic excellence. These supports prevent and alleviate back pain and reduce fatigue, associated with sitting for long periods. Back support is particularly critical for people who spend the bulk of their workday behind the steering wheel.

In extreme cases, you may want to consider replacing the seat itself. This is actually much easier than it sounds – and definitely worth the effort.

Steering Clear

An ergonomic steering wheel? Absolutely!

Steering wheels were initially made out of metal or equally unyielding dense materials. They were also larger than they are today. The advent of power steering led to smaller, softer and more ergonomic steering wheels.

The original purpose of the steering wheel hasn’t changed since the days of Henry Ford. Today, however, the steering wheel usually houses an airbag and a horn. Many ergonomically-correct models also incorporate radio and cruise control elements.

Maybe It Should Be Called a “Neckrest”

If you think your car’s headrest was designed for your head, you are partially right. You are also partially wrong. The headrest, properly placed is actually intended to protect your neck.

Unfortunately, headrests are not always spine or posture friendly. This lack of spinal support, resulting from the gap between the headrest and driver’s neck, may actually contribute to whiplash.

One American company is manufacturing an ergonomically-correct cushion that attaches to a car’s existing headrest. Following the natural curve of the cervical spine, it provides full support and encourages a relaxed, neutral posture that reduces back and lower-back pain – and may avert whiplash.

Headrests are equally necessary in the back seat to protect the neck from extension-related injuries; when the head lurches forward and backward in a rapid motion. “The headrest, whether in the front or back seat, should be high enough to prevent the head from falling backwards,” explains Dr. James Casper, a chiropractor based in Utica, New York, who has extensively studied car ergonomics. “If the headrest isn’t in the proper place, it becomes a fulcrum for the head to snap back over – as opposed to stopping the head’s backward momentum”.

Mirror, Mirror, on the Windshield

To prevent poor driving posture, Dr. Casper suggests tilting your rear-view mirror upward. “This will cause you to sit up straight to look into the mirror, thereby improving the proper alignment of your spinal column and strengthening those posture muscles.”

“Most people spend several hours of their day in the car. You can do things to hurt yourself while driving (such as slouching and turning yourself into a human pretzel), or you can actually improve your health in the car by doing some subtle exercises that won't cause you to become distracted.”

Simply flexing the foot back and forth at the ankle can easily stretch calf muscles. (Caution: if you are driving, wait to flex the right foot until you are out the car!)

“I’m Driving Now Please Leave a Message”

A cell phone that is not hands-free is perhaps the most ergonomic-unfriendly product on the planet. Cradled between the top of the shoulder and the ear, it's a cervical spine nightmare. Even Houdini would have problems with some of the contortions people twist themselves into while trying to drive, talk on the phone, change the radio station and eat lunch.

Some luxury cars feature the ultimate in hands-free phone use: voice-activated systems. By stating the name of the person to be called, or reciting the phone number, the system automatically does the dialling. The same holds true with the car's voice-activated navigation system.

As anyone who has studied ergonomics will tell you, no two people are created exactly alike. If we were, this would definitely be a one-size-fits-all world. That's why it's important to include your chiropractor in your quest for an ergonomic-friendly car. Make an appointment today and let your doctor of chiropractic help put you in the driver's seat: the ergonomically-correct driver's seat, that is!

Here's your Homework:

The next time you settle into the driver's seat of your car, think for a moment and consider your surroundings.

- Can you reach the accelerator and brake pedals easily?
- Is your steering wheel at the correct height?
- How much space is behind the back of your neck and your headrest?
- Do you have a hands-free cell phone?
- Is your seat comfortable?
- Do you ever experience sciatica pain while driving?

Become fully conscious of your physical environment. If you answered “no” to any of the questions listed above, plan to make the necessary adjustments. Ask your doctor of chiropractic for recommendations specific to your needs.