



# Wellness News Network™

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## Can Chiropractic lend me a hand... with my hand symptoms?

### Presented by:

When you have symptoms in one or both of your hands, a chiropractor might not be the first person you think of... but after reading this issue of Wellness Express™, we hope you will change your mind.

Since chiropractors are experts when it comes to nerves, joints and muscles, there are very few conditions affecting the hand that your chiropractor cannot help you with. In this report, some of the most common reasons for hand symptoms will be presented, including the approach that your chiropractor may use to help alleviate them.

### THE CAUSE

Unless you experience direct trauma to the hand (crushing, slicing, freezing, etc.), most symptoms can be traced back to the irritation and/or inflammation of nerves, muscles or joints associated with that area of the body.



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When irritation of nerves exiting the spine is thought to be the cause, it is called **radicular** pain. If tight and sore muscles (with trigger points) can be attributed to the symptoms, this is **referred** pain and when an inflammatory condition involving one of the local tissues in the hand is causing the symptoms, it is referred to as a case of ...**itis** (arthritis, tendinitis, neuritis, etc.)

Radicular pain is typically caused by compression or irritation of a cervical nerve (also called **radiculopathy**). This can be caused by disc herniation, vertebral subluxation, mechanical irritation by osteophytes (bone spurs) or chemical irritation by inflammation of surrounding tissues. The pain associated with radiculopathy is usually sharp, and well-defined according to the nerve that is being irritated. There may also be some weakness in the hand associated with radiculopathy, as the nerve signals for motor control will travel along the same nerve that carries sensory information. If your symptoms are caused by a radiculopathy, your chiropractor will be able to reproduce or aggravate your symptoms by performing specific provocation tests with your neck.

### QUESTION:

What inflammatory condition can affect the hands?

- A) arthritis
- B) tendinitis
- C) neuritis
- D) All of the above

### ANSWER:

D) All of the above

### TRUE OR FALSE:

Referred pain is caused by irritation of nerves exiting the spine

### ANSWER:

False – it is radicular pain

### QUESTION:

Which condition is NOT a typical sign of inflammation?

- A) redness
- B) swelling
- C) bruising

### ANSWER:

C) bruising

Referred pain is caused by muscle tightness and spasm, leading to “trigger points.” Typically, when a muscle is over-used or severely strained, it can develop tight bands or knots within it. When this happens, the muscle itself can become very sensitive, and will often develop trigger points. Trigger points are localized areas within a muscle that, when pressed upon, will refer pain in a predictable pattern away from that point. Referred pain from trigger points is usually more achy and diffuse, and is exacerbated by pressing on the muscle itself.

Pain from inflammation will vary depending upon the tissue affected. As a result, any movements that challenge that tissue will exacerbate the symptoms, plus, redness, heat and swelling can usually be found in the immediate area. *Rheumatoid arthritis* or *osteoarthritis* can affect the joints of the fingers and hand in a typical pattern. *Tendinitis* or *tenosynovitis* can target the tendons of the fingers or wrist, leading to such common conditions as “Carpal Tunnel Syndrome” or “Trigger Finger.”

## THE CURE

The first thing your chiropractor will do when you present with hand symptoms is to differentiate between the potential contributing factors to determine the cause.<sup>1</sup> If necessary, you may be sent for special imaging to confirm your chiropractor’s diagnosis. Next, a treatment plan will be created, taking into consideration the history of your condition, its severity and/or chronicity, and its impact on your daily activities.

Although radicular pain is the only condition mentioned above that is **directly** caused by neck misalignment and subluxation, your chiropractor will always check to make sure your spine is aligned properly when symptoms of hand problems are present. All nerves to and from the hand find their origin in the cervical spine and since the nervous system is the conduit for all brain-body communication, adjusting the spine has proven to be helpful for a number of hand conditions, including Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.<sup>2</sup>

If the symptoms in your hand are caused by referred pain or a local inflammatory condition (an ...*itis*), your chiropractor may also recommend supplementary treatments like ice, trigger point therapy, massage, stretching or special exercises you can do at home. Referral to other healthcare professionals may be necessary for some conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Remember: no matter what symptoms you feel in your musculoskeletal system, rely on your chiropractor **FIRST** to lend you a hand!



## Quote to Inspire

*“Wringing your hands only stops you from rolling up your sleeves”*

*James Rollins*

## References and sources:

1. Daub CW. A case report of a patient with upper extremity symptoms: differentiating radicular and referred pain. *Chiropractic & Osteopathy* 2007; 15:10. Published online 2007 July 19. doi: 10.1186/1746-1340-15-10
2. Perez R, Auyong S. Chiropractic manipulative therapy of carpal tunnel syndrome. *J Chiro Med* 2002;1:75-78.



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