

# Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic Annual Report

## *Managing Neck and Back Pain in America*



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## *Executive Summary*

1

### **PREVALENCE**

- Neck and back pain is common among adults in the U.S. About two-thirds of U.S. adults (62%) have had neck or back pain significant enough that they saw a health care professional for care at some point in their lifetime, including 25% who did so in the last 12 months.

2

### **PREFERENCES**

- For neck or back pain care, eight out of 10 adults in the United States (80%) prefer to see a health care professional who is an expert in spine-related conditions instead of a general medicine professional who treats a variety of conditions (15%).
- Adults in the U.S. want more options available for neck or back pain care. While two-thirds (67%) prefer to see a health care practitioner who can offer prescription medication or surgery to treat neck or back pain, more than one in four (28%) prefer to see a health care practitioner who does not use prescription medication or surgery.
- Prescription pain medications are not preferred as a first step for care among the vast majority of U.S. adults. When given a choice, nearly eight out of 10 (79%) say they prefer to try other ways to address physical pain before they take pain medication prescribed by a doctor, demonstrating an openness to non-drug remedies.

3

### **HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS**

- Medical doctors and doctors of chiropractic are U.S. adults' top choices for neck or back pain care. Among those who saw a health care professional for neck or back pain in the last 12 months, 62% saw a medical doctor and 53% saw a chiropractor. About a third saw a physical therapist (34%) or massage therapist (34%) for care.
- Effectiveness of care is a big reason that adults with neck or back pain chose their health care provider. Nearly half of adults who saw a chiropractor for significant neck or back pain (52%) said one of the biggest reasons they chose chiropractic care was because "this health care professional provides the most effective treatment for my pain." More than four in 10 patients who saw a physical therapist (42%) and 23% who saw a medical doctor for significant neck or back pain said effectiveness was one of the biggest reasons they chose this type of health care provider.
- Safety is a chief reason why some people choose chiropractors and physical therapists to address their back and neck pain. Half of adults who saw a physical therapist and 54% of adults who saw a chiropractor for significant back and neck pain in the past 12 months say "this health care professional provides the safest treatment for my pain with the fewest side effects."
- Some adults who saw a medical doctor (38%) or physical therapist (47%) for significant neck or back pain also listed insurance coverage as a major reason they chose that health care provider.

## 4

### CARE

- While many neck or back pain patients use self-care techniques — non-drug therapies such as superficial heat (77%), yoga (72%) and cold packs (60%) — to address their neck or back pain, many also use non-drug therapies that require a health care professional for care, such as massage (53%), spinal adjustment (47%) and physical therapy (42%).
- Over-the-counter medications are a common treatment method for adults who suffer from significant back or neck pain. Nearly three in four neck or back pain patients (73%) took a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), and half took acetaminophen. More than one in five patients with significant neck or back pain used prescription pain medication.

## 5

### PATIENT EXPERIENCES

- Patients who saw a chiropractor, a physical therapist or a medical doctor for significant neck or back pain in the past 12 months report a high level of care from these practitioners.

#### Chiropractors

- Roughly nine out of 10 adults who saw a chiropractor most often for significant neck or back pain in the last 12 months say their chiropractor often listens (93%), provides convenient, quick access to care (93%), demonstrates care/compassion (91%) and explains things well (88%) — and 90% of chiropractic patients say that their chiropractor spends the right amount of time with them.

#### Physical Therapists

- More than eight out of 10 adults who saw a physical therapist most often for significant neck or back pain in the last 12 months say their physical therapist often listens (88%), demonstrates care/compassion (86%), provides convenient, quick access to care (86%) and explains things well (83%).

#### Medical Doctors

- Adults who saw a medical doctor most often for neck or back pain are less likely than patients of chiropractors or physical therapists to say their health care provider often did these things — although majorities still do. Of adults who went to a medical doctor most often for significant neck or back pain in the last 12 months, 72% say their medical doctor often listens; 67% say they often explain things well; and 66% say they often demonstrate care/compassion. Fewer say their medical doctor often provides convenient, quick access to care (53%).

## *Introduction*

In 2015, Palmer College of Chiropractic commissioned Gallup to conduct an annual study of Americans' attitudes about and experiences with chiropractic care, as well as other methods for addressing neck and back pain. The 2018 *Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic Annual Report: Managing Neck and Back Pain in America* details the results of the fourth annual Gallup-Palmer study. This report highlights findings on Americans' preferences for neck or back pain care, patient experiences with neck or back pain providers, and the prevalence of various techniques for neck or back pain care in the United States.

The results are based on a nationally representative Gallup Panel™ web and mail study completed by 5,377 national adults aged 18 or older, with 4,882 completions from the web and 495 from mail. This study was conducted from March 12-April 10, 2018.



# 1

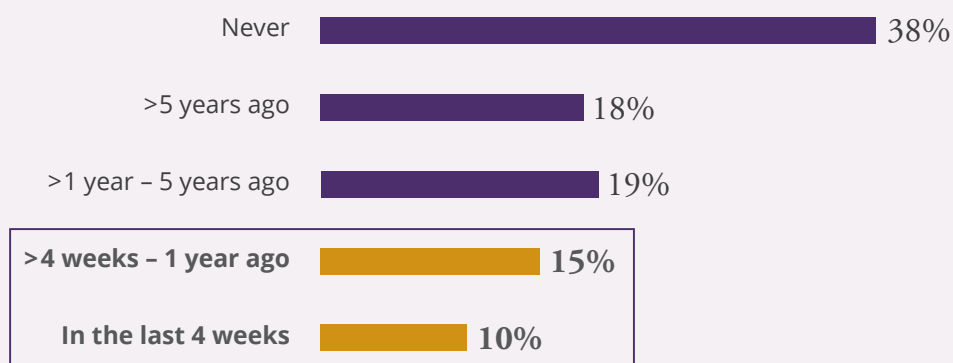


## Prevalence

Spine pain is common among adults in the U.S. About two-thirds of U.S. adults (62%) have had neck or back pain significant enough that they saw a health care professional for care at some point in their lifetime. One in four adults (25%) saw a health care professional for significant neck or back pain in the last 12 months. This is consistent with findings from the *2017 Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic Annual Report: Americans' Views of Prescription Pain Medication and Chiropractic Care*.

### One in Four Adults Sought Care for Neck and Back Pain in the Past 12 Months

When was the *LAST* time that you had neck and back pain significant enough that you saw a health care professional for care? (n=5,359)

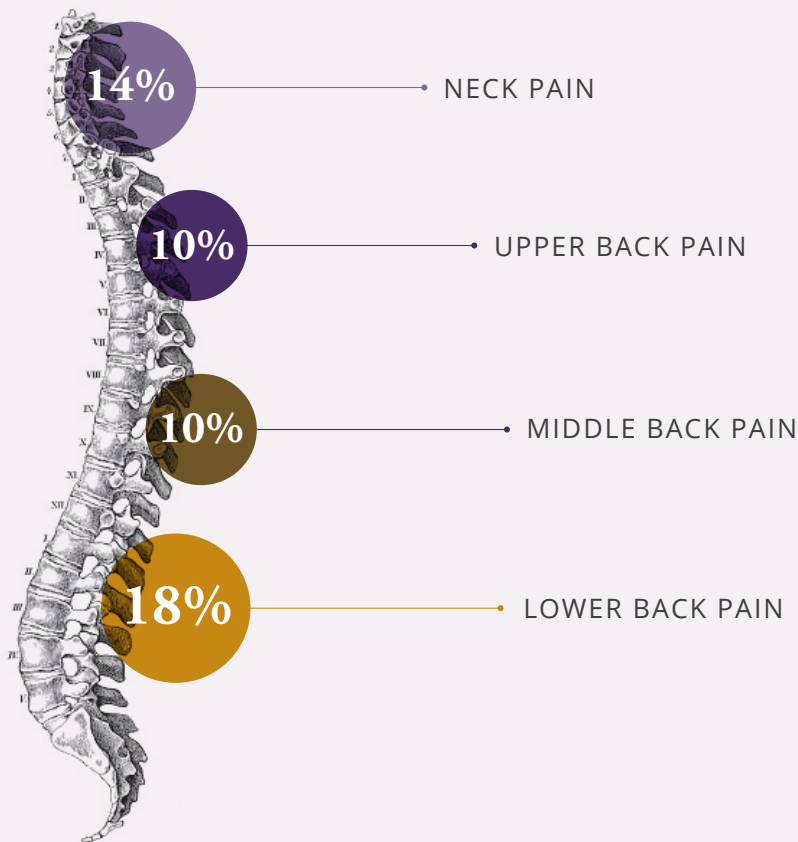


Nearly one in five adults in the United States (18%) saw a health care professional for significant lower back pain in the last 12 months, and 14% say they saw a health care professional for neck pain. One in 10 adults saw a health care professional for middle back pain in the last 12 months, and the same proportion did so for upper back pain.

Neck or back pain sufferers are often dealing with multiple types of pain when they seek care. Nearly nine in 10 adults who saw a health care professional for neck or back pain in the last 12 months (88%) saw a health care professional for two or more of these pains.

### Nearly One in Five Saw a Health Care Professional For Low Back Pain in the Last 12 Months

*Did you see a health care professional for any of the following in the last 12 months?*  
(% Yes) (n=5,377)





# 2

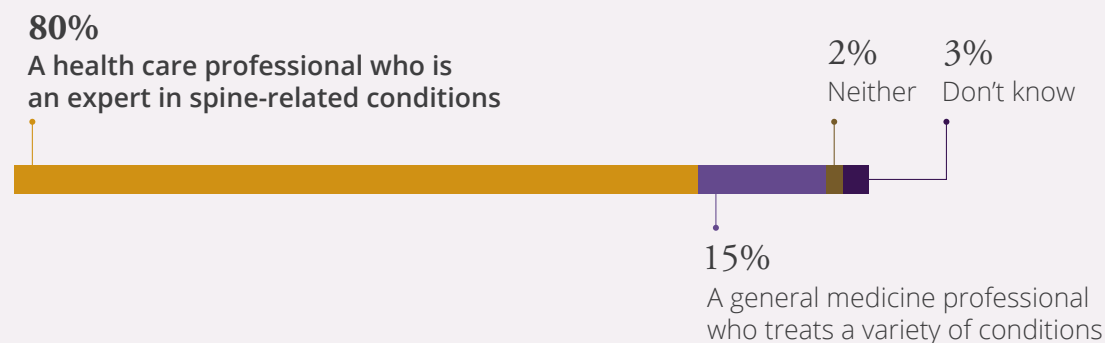


## Preferences

Most adults in the United States prefer spine experts for neck or back pain care. Eight in 10 adults in the United States (80%) prefer to see a health care professional who is an expert in spine-related conditions for neck or back pain care instead of a general medicine professional who treats a variety of conditions (15%). While general medicine professionals are often a first point of contact for Americans suffering from neck or back pain, most of these adults desire care from a spine expert who has deep knowledge and experience in caring for neck or back pain. Knowing this, general medicine professionals should consider collaborating with spine experts to offer the highest level of care to neck or back pain sufferers.

### Spine Experts Preferred for Neck or Back Pain Care

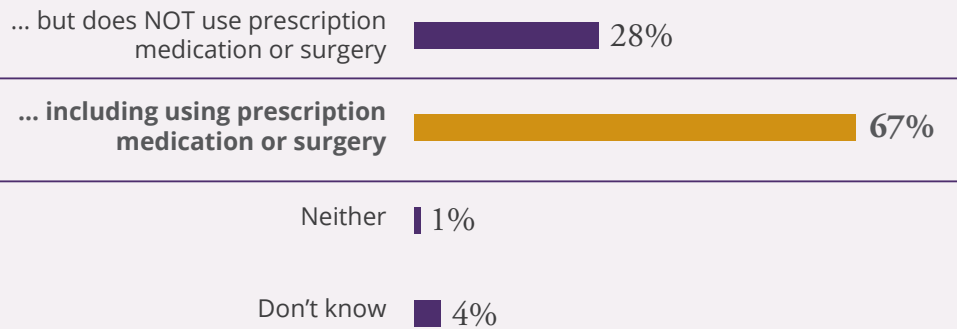
Suppose you were experiencing neck or back pain significant enough that you wanted to see a health care provider about it. If the cost was the same for all providers, who would you PREFER to see about your neck and back pain? (n=5,360)



Two-thirds of U.S. adults (67%) prefer to see a health care practitioner who offers prescription medication or surgery for neck or back pain, while 28% prefer to see a health care practitioner who does not use prescription medication or surgery. As a whole, Americans seem to prefer having more options available for their pain.

### Two-Thirds of U.S. Adults Want Provider Who Offers Surgery or Drugs

Again, suppose you were experiencing neck or back pain significant enough that you wanted to see a health care provider about it. If the cost was the same for all providers, who would you PREFER to see about your neck or back pain? A health care practitioner who treats back or neck pain using a variety of methods ... (n=5,361)



Adults suffering from physical pain can choose from a variety of options to address their pain, but most U.S. adults prefer non-drug pain management as their first course of action. Nearly eight out of 10 U.S. adults (79%) say they prefer to try other ways to address physical pain before they take pain medication prescribed by a doctor, while two out of 10 U.S. adults (21%) say they prefer to take pain medication prescribed by a doctor to address physical pain. These findings are consistent with the 2017 Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic report, which highlighted Americans' demand for non-drug options.

### Most U.S. Adults Prefer Non-Drug Pain Management



# 3



## *Health Care Providers*

Medical doctors and doctors of chiropractic are U.S. adults' top choices for neck or back pain care. Among those who saw a health care professional for neck or back pain in the last 12 months, 62% saw a medical doctor and 53% saw a chiropractor. About a third saw a physical therapist (34%) or massage therapist (34%) for care.

Most neck or back pain patients (81%) saw more than one type of health care provider for care in the last 12 months, demonstrating a willingness to address their pain through different types of care. Neck or back pain sufferers who are already seeking care from multiple providers may welcome an integrated approach in which different providers work together.

62%  
MEDICAL  
DOCTOR

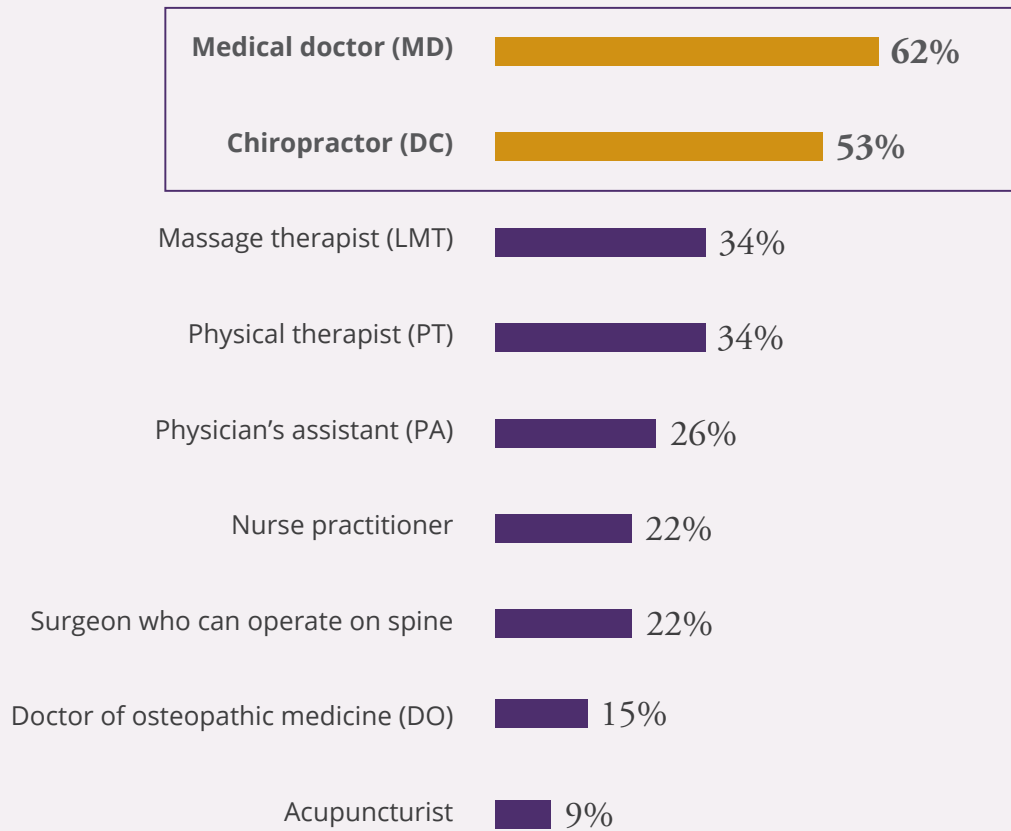
53%  
CHIROPRACTOR

34%  
PHYSICAL  
THERAPIST

34%  
MASSAGE  
THERAPIST

### Medical Doctors, Chiropractors Top Choices for Neck or Back Pain

*Did you see any of the following health care professionals for your neck or back pain in the last 12 months? (Among those who saw a health care professional for neck or back pain in the last 12 months) (n=988-1,157)*



Neck or back pain patients choose health care providers for a variety of reasons. Patients were asked to indicate the biggest reasons why they chose a certain type of provider from a list of 10 possible reasons. Effectiveness of care is a major reason that adults with significant neck or back pain say they chose their health care provider. Roughly half of adults (52%) who saw a chiropractor for significant neck or back pain say they chose chiropractic care because “this health care professional provides the most effective treatment for my pain.” More than four in 10 patients who saw a physical therapist (42%) and 23% who saw a medical doctor for significant neck or back pain say effectiveness was the biggest reason they chose this health care provider.

Many patients also indicate safety is a primary reason they chose chiropractors and physical therapists for their back and neck pain. Half of adults who saw a physical therapist and 54% of adults who saw a chiropractor for significant back and neck pain in the past 12 months say “this health care professional provides the safest treatment for my pain with the fewest side effects.”

More than half of patients (53%) who chose a chiropractor for their neck and back pain and 30% of adults who chose a medical doctor indicate that trust is a reason for their choice. Insurance coverage is a major reason nearly half of patients (47%) who chose to see a physical therapist and 38% of adults who saw a medical doctor for neck or back pain gave for their choice of provider. This finding suggests that some patients are selecting health care providers based, at least in part, on financial factors.

	Chiropractors	Physical Therapists	Medical Doctors
Safest with fewest side effects	54%	50%	16%
Trust	53%	25%	30%
Most effective	52%	42%	23%
Has insurance coverage	21%	47%	38%
Knows what to expect	21%	10%	13%
Costs less money	12%	12%	15%
Always goes	10%	2%	26%
No referral needed	9%	7%	11%
Knows costs	9%	1%	5%
Don't know enough about other options	2%	4%	8%

# 4



## *Care*

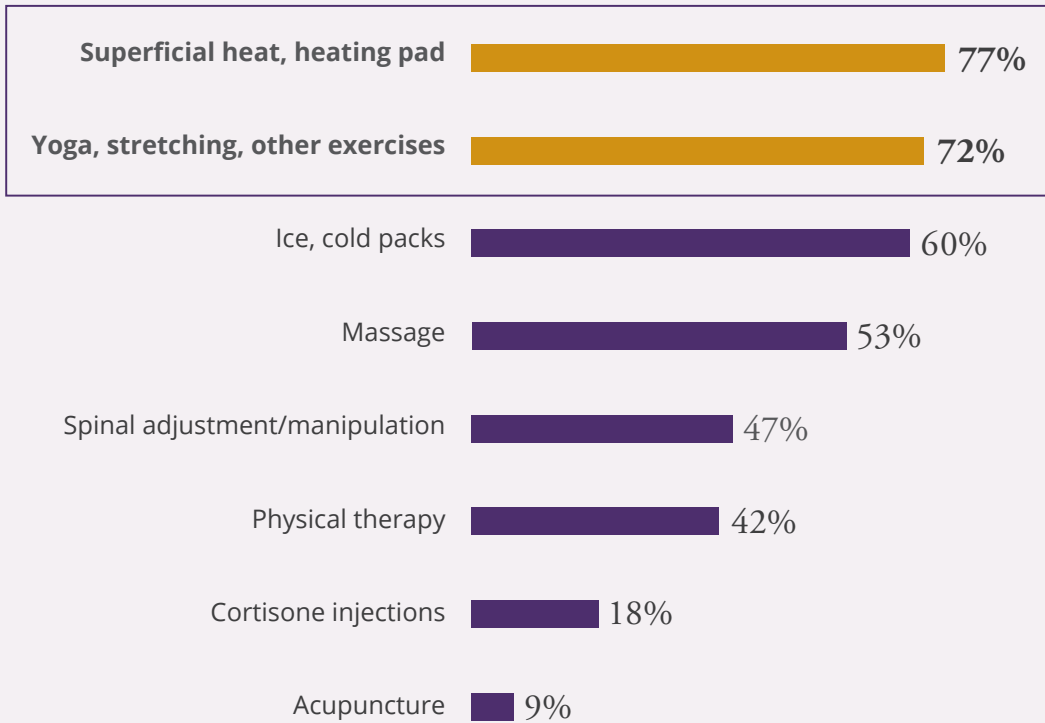
In 2017, in the midst of the growing opioid crisis, the American College of Physicians (ACP) recommended that physicians and patients address acute or subacute low back pain with non-drug therapies, such as superficial heat, massage, acupuncture or spinal manipulation. Additionally, if drug therapy was desired, physicians and patients were recommended to select nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or skeletal muscle relaxants.<sup>1</sup>

While many neck or back pain patients used self-care techniques — non-drug therapies such as superficial heat (77%), yoga (72%) and cold packs (60%) — for their neck or back pain in the last 12 months, many also used non-drug therapies that require a health care professional for care, such as massage (53%), spinal adjustment (47%) and physical therapy (42%).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acponline.org/acp-newsroom/american-college-of-physicians-issues-guideline-for-treating-nonradicular-low-back-pain>

### Three in Four Adults Used Heat, Yoga/Stretching/Exercises for Significant Neck or Back Pain

Did you try any of the following for your neck or back pain in the last 12 months? (Asked of those who saw a health care professional for neck or back pain in the last 12 months) (n=1,230-1,331)



### More Than One in Five People Who Saw a Health Care Professional for Neck or Back Pain Used Opioids in the Past 12 Months

Did you try any of the following for your neck or back pain in the last 12 months? (Asked of those who saw a health care professional for neck or back pain in the last 12 months) (n=1,308-1,367)



Use of over-the-counter medications is common among adults who suffer from significant back or neck pain. Nearly three in four neck or back pain patients (73%) took a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), such as Advil®, ibuprofen, aspirin or Aleve® for their pain in the past 12 months, and half took acetaminophen, such as Tylenol®. More than one in five patients with significant neck or back pain used prescription pain medication — 22% say they took opioids<sup>2</sup> and 22% say they took benzodiazepines, commonly called “benzos,” such as Valium®, Xanax®, or Klonopin®, or muscle relaxants such as Flexeril®. Fewer — 12% — say they took a Gabapentin or Neurontin for their neck or back pain.

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<sup>2</sup> This includes opioids, such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, methadone, Buprenorphine, Percocet®, OxyContin®, Vicodin, Percodan®, Tylox®, and Demerol®.



# 5



## *Patient Experiences*

Patients who saw a medical doctor, a chiropractor or a physical therapist for significant neck or back pain in the past 12 months report receiving a high level of care from these practitioners. However, patients rate their chiropractors and physical therapists particularly well on wait times and style of interaction with the patient.

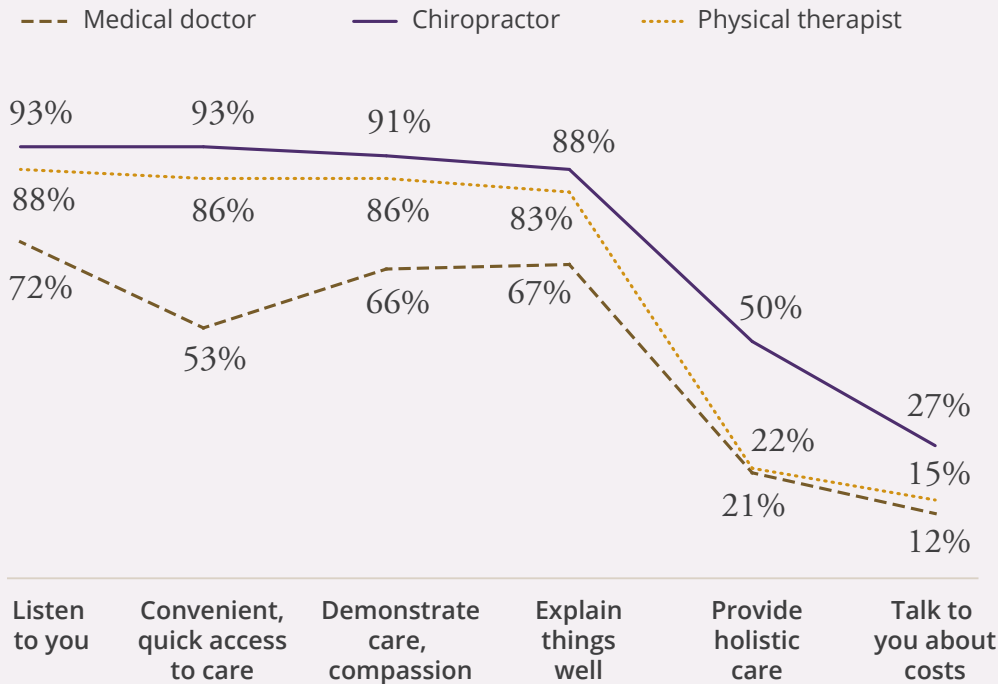
More than eight out of 10 adults who saw a physical therapist most often for significant neck or back pain in the last 12 months say their physical therapist often listens (88%), demonstrates care/compassion (86%), provides convenient, quick access to care (86%) and explains things well (83%).

Adults who saw a medical doctor most often are less likely to say their medical doctor often did these things — although majorities still do. Of adults who went to a medical doctor for significant neck or back pain in the last 12 months, 72% say their medical doctor often listens; 67% say they often explain things well; and 66% say they often demonstrate care/compassion. Fewer say their medical doctor often provides convenient, quick access to care (53%).

Roughly nine out of 10 adults who saw a chiropractor most often say their chiropractor often listens (93%), provides convenient, quick access to care (93%), demonstrates care/compassion (91%) and explains things well (88%) — and 90% believe that their chiropractor spends the right amount of time with them. Half of patients say their chiropractor often provides holistic care.

### Chiropractors, Physical Therapists Consistently Provide Key Elements of Care

How often did your health care provider do each of the following? (% Often)



Base: MD n=177-200; Chiropractor n=312-329; PT n=175-184

### Chiropractic Care

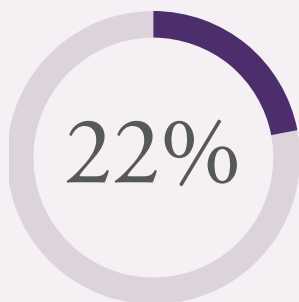
Among all U.S. adults, including those who did not have neck or back pain, 16% went to a chiropractor in the last 12 months. This is consistent with the findings from the [2015, 2016 and 2017 Gallup-Palmer College of Chiropractic annual reports](#). Recommendations are an important predictor of whether or not someone will go to a chiropractor. Seven out of 10 chiropractic patients (74%) say someone recommended chiropractic care to them before they went to a chiropractor for the first time. On average, chiropractic patients were 30 years old when they first saw a chiropractor as a patient.

Participants in this study were also asked to describe what they thought were the benefits of chiropractic care. The top answers given were pain relief (22%), an alternative to medication/surgery/traditional medicine (16%), general alignment/maintenance/manipulation (15%), and overall/holistic/long-term wellness (8%). About one in five (19%) did not feel there were any benefits of chiropractic care.

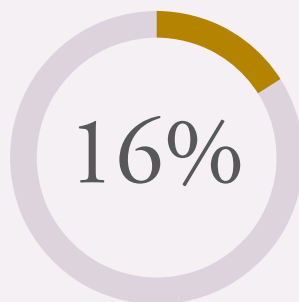
### Benefits of Chiropractic Care

Base: n=3,407

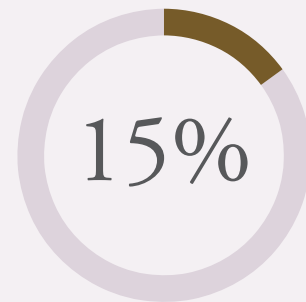
Question text: In your opinion, what are the benefits of chiropractic care? (Open-ended)



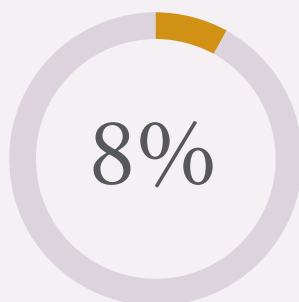
Pain relief



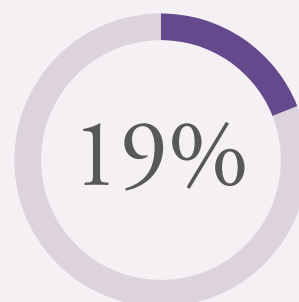
An alternative to medication/  
surgery/traditional medicine



General alignment/  
maintenance/manipulation



Overall/holistic/  
long-term wellness



Did not feel there were  
any benefits of chiropractic care

## *Conclusion*

Neck or back pain continues to be common among adults in the U.S. Patients often use various methods to address their pain and visit more than one type of health care professional for care. In the last 12 months, many neck or back pain patients used non-drug techniques such as superficial heat, yoga and cold packs. Many also used non-drug therapies that require a health care professional for care, such as spinal adjustment, physical therapy and massage. Given a choice, most U.S. adults prefer non-drug pain management as the first step to address their pain; however, many patients want prescription pain medication available to them should they need it.

A majority of adults with significant neck or back pain saw a medical doctor and/or a chiropractor in the past 12 months. Most neck or back pain patients say their medical doctor, chiropractor or physical therapist often listens, demonstrates care/compassion, explains things well, and provides convenient, quick access to care. Patients of chiropractors and physical therapists were more likely than patients of medical doctors to say that their provider often did each of these things. An integrated approach to neck or back pain care, one in which different types of providers work together, could be an asset to neck or back pain sufferers in America.

## *Methods*

The results are based on a Gallup Panel web and mail study completed by 5,377 national adults, aged 18 and older, with 4,882 completions from the web and 495 from mail. This study was conducted from March 12-April 10, 2018. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Gallup also uses address-based sampling methods to recruit Panel members.

The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel, and members do not expect to receive incentives for participating. The sample for this study was weighted to be demographically representative of the U.S. adult population, using the most recent Current Population Survey figures. For results based on the total sample, one can say that the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 2.2$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error are higher for subsamples with a margin of error of  $\pm 11.9$  percentage points for the smallest subsample of  $n=175$ . In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error and bias into the findings of public opinion polls. The study was commissioned by Palmer College of Chiropractic.

## *About Gallup*

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

## *About Palmer College of Chiropractic*

Palmer College of Chiropractic is the founding college of the chiropractic profession and is known as The Trusted Leader in Chiropractic Education®. It was founded in 1897, in Davenport, Iowa, by D. D. Palmer, the discoverer of chiropractic. More than 2,200 students attend Palmer College campuses in Davenport, Iowa; Port Orange, Florida; and San Jose, California. Palmer's nearly 30,000 practicing alumni comprise almost half of the doctors of chiropractic in the United States. To view Gallup-Palmer annual reports from 2015-2017, visit <https://www.palmer.edu/gallup-report/>.

