

THE SILENT KILLER

By Dr. Derek Conte

Susie gets into a car accident. There is minor damage to her car and her neck hurts a lot for a week. She gets anti-inflammatories and muscle relaxers from her doctor and the pain begins to pass. She thinks of it as a 'minor' accident and does nothing about it except to take some extra strength Tylenol now and then and have the dent in her car repaired. Susie can no longer rotate her head as easily to see when she's merging into traffic or parking her car, but it's not yet too much of a restriction for her to overcome by twisting her body a bit, so she lets it go. The Tylenol controls the pain and she's just too busy with life to deal with it. She is no complainer. Not Susie.

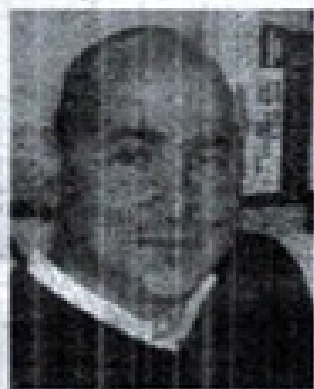
Johnny falls from a tree, hurts his back and loses his breath. His mom answers his cries and consoles him. After a few minutes and a soothing snack, he seems fine and resumes his play. After that, he has the slightest change in his posture and, although he never complains of pain, he is not the same. His body has compensated for this trauma and will continue to do so unless his spinal misalignment is corrected. If not, Johnny will suffer the consequences later in his life. So will Susie.

I have seen many patients like these in my practice, most of whom have no idea how their spines came to show significant arthritis when we look at their X-rays. It is a sobering experience for both of us. These problems can start small without prolonged symptoms. Even 'minor' injuries produce weaknesses in the connective

tissue (ligaments) which hold the joints securely together in their optimal biomechanical relationships, causing a loss of alignment. The spine then locks down into this stressed position to protect itself, losing its full range of motion and beginning the process of degenerative joint disease (DJD = osteoarthritis). This process will take years to develop and, when it does, can significantly degrade a person's quality of life. Symptoms begin with pain, decreased range of motion, the formation of osteophytes (overgrowth of bone that can exert pressure on nerves), stenosis (narrowing of the canals that transmit the nerves and spinal cord) and radiating pain to the arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet or toes. Eventually numbness and tingling appear in these extremities leading to the last stages of atrophy (shrinking) of the muscles, loss of function of an arm or leg, fusion of the vertebrae and constant, unbearable pain. At this stage, surgical intervention may be considered if chiropractic cannot help.

These problems are common and serious. They are not part of the normal process of aging and can certainly be prevented if proper alignment is restored. As with your teeth, it is always best to get injuries – even 'minor' ones - checked out right away. It's worth it. Your children are worth it. You are worth it.

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