

Is It Out?

Probably the biggest misunderstanding about Chiropractic and is that the bones are out of place and being adjusted back into place. Allow me to clarify.

Often chiropractors try to simplify the explanation of an adjustment and/or miscommunicate the idea of the “bone being out of place”, frankly this is not what is happening. Now it may be true on an x-ray that your spine is misaligned and that a chiropractor may work in the area of this misalignment, as often this is the area where the pain occurs, but the idea the bone is being realigned in one visit makes no sense.

The anatomy: First the anatomy of the joint. Strong joint capsules (made of [ligaments](#)) connect the [vertebra](#) bone-to-bone. Muscles are connected to bone, by a [tendon](#) or [fascia](#), and they cross over joints and connect to the next bone. It is the contraction of muscles that moves our body and joints.

Muscles, ligaments, tendons and fascia all have a certain amount of elasticity; that is the ability to stretch and return to normal length, just like a rubber band. Now some of the tissues are more elastic than others depending on function and/or location in the body.

Try this: bend your finger sideways, it now is certainly misaligned. Now let it go, and the finger returns to its’ original position. Why? The surrounding ligaments do not instantly change length.

Example: Watch an [NFL](#) football game. These players are not all bent sideways after the game. Their joints are inflamed and their muscles are sore but the ligaments hold their bones in alignment.

Try another: attempt to do the splits, some people can but most can’t. How many yoga classes would it take you to do the splits? Well depending on your inherent flexibility it could take years as soft tissue can’t change length instantly.

The same is true for the tissue in and around the joints of your spine. It takes multiple adjustments and stretching/traction to change the elastic qualities and the length of the soft tissue.

So what IS the adjustment doing? The adjustment is relaxing the muscles, breaking up adhesions and allowing built-up chemicals to flow from the tissues, so the joint can move more efficiently, without actually changing the bones position. So in the end chiropractors are not pushing bones back into place, rather we are increasing the joints range-of-motion.

Exception to this rule: The one exception is if there is an acute muscle spasm. In this case the joint may be misaligned, although just a few millimeters, and once that muscle relaxes then the joint can realign.