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Consumer Reports Recommends Chiropractic

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April 6, 2009 -- Back pain can be a big pain in the neck. To deal with it, many U.S. adults favor hands-on therapies such as chiropractic manipulation, massage, and physical therapy, a new survey says.

Consumer Reports says in its May issue that 80% of adults in the U.S. report having been bothered by back pain at some point in their lives. The Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center surveyed 14,000 subscribers who reported experiencing back pain in the past year but who had never undergone back surgery. More than half said the pain severely limited their daily routines for at least a week, and many said it interfered with sex, sleep, and weight control.

It found that:

- 88% of respondents said back pain recurred through the year.
- 35% said they'd never consulted a professional to help with lower back pain.

Of those who'd sought help:

- 58% said chiropractic manipulation had helped a lot.
- 48% said massage had eased their pain.
- 46% said physical therapy had benefited them.

The respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with various treatments. Of those reporting they were highly satisfied:

- 59% had seen chiropractors
- 55% had seen physical therapists
- 53% had seen acupuncturists
- 44% had seen physician specialists
- 34% had seen primary care doctors

Consumer Reports says most respondents had tried five or six different treatments and that many with prolonged pain said they hadn't seen a health professional because they didn't believe anything could help.

The survey also found that:

- 45% of people who took prescription drugs said they helped a lot.
- 55% of people given a prescription drug received an opioid pain reliever, even though the publication says there's little research to support the use of such medications for acute low-back pain.

Consumer Reports advises people with low back pain to:

- Discuss the problem with a primary care doctor.
- Consider seeing a chiropractor or physical therapist.
- Use caution when considering surgery.
- Get a second opinion before deciding on surgery.

It conducted a separate survey of about 1,000 people who'd had back surgery in the past five years and found that only 60% were completely or very satisfied with the results. And more than 50% reported at least one problem with recovery.

"Patients should be aware that significant problems during recovery may be underestimated," Consumer Reports says in a news release.