

## Chiropractic and Spinal Care Protects Soccer Players from Long-Term Health Hazards Associated with Neck Degeneration

**Every sport consists of a unique set of benefits and risks.** These counterparts even exist in the world's most popular sport. More professional and amateur athletes participate in soccer than in any sport in the world. Soccer requires both physical skill and mental strategy to work as a team with the singular objective of kicking the ball into the opposing team's goal. The most interesting and unique aspect of soccer involves players pursuing their objective without being able to touch the ball with their hands. The rules make soccer both challenging and fun while also subjecting players to significant short and long-term health challenges.

Players compensate for their hands by advancing and scoring using their feet, chest, and head to kick, block, or pass the ball. One method of advancing a ball in flight involves executing a header, when a player impacts the ball by using their head and forehead to impact and direct the ball. **Such collisions do not occur without consequence.**

Research showed the amount of force generated while completing a header averages as much as 450 lbs. on the head, neck, and spine. The study revealed that the cervical spine absorbs a significant amount of force when a player uses their head to strike the ball. Degeneration of the cervical spine (neck vertebrae) for some soccer players occurs as much as 10-20 years earlier in than that of the normal population. The advanced health deterioration originates from the high impact trauma to the neck vertebrae caused by heading the ball. Other significant pathologies found in the spines of soccer players included disc bulging, bone spurs, disc protrusions, loss of the normal neck curve, and spinal cord compression.



These traumatic consequences originate from heading a soccer ball regularly. The forward movement of the head towards the ball creates a collision which poses significant long-term health risks. Many soccer players establish and maintain a health-restoring relationship with a Chiropractor for the sake of their long-term performance and wellness. **All soccer players need to understand the importance of proactive care and prevention for the trauma inflicted by repeated collisions to the head and neck.** Waiting until pain and symptoms surface usually indicates the already existing presence of degenerative damage. Chiropractic adjustments keep the spine in alignment and moving properly to avoid the buildup of adhesions which lead to scar tissue and degeneration. The spine also provides stress-reducing side effects from each adjustment that removes stress from the central nervous system.

**Other precautions and action steps that accompany Chiropractic care to mitigate long term spinal damage from soccer include:**

- 1) Insist all players learn and implement proper heading techniques.
- 2) Engage with a Chiropractor regularly to ensure that every athlete maintains proper alignment and movement throughout the spine.
- 3) Utilize neck extension exercises and use a proper pillow.
- 4) Strengthen and stretch the extensor muscles of the back on a regular basis.
- 5) Consume a diet filled with anti-inflammatory foods and spices. Excellent food choices include avocados, coconut oil, green leafy vegetables, and turmeric.