

A patient came to see me the other day suffering with back pain. Not unusual of course, except that the cause of his pain was a guy at work who tried to “pop” his back. I would like to explain why this is a bad idea.

First of all, for employers, if this happens at work it could result in a worker’s compensation claim. Second, for the person who does this sort of thing, you could be charged with practicing chiropractic without a license and fined \$5,000 and/or spend some time in jail. Finally, as this individual experienced, it can cause damage.

Contrary to popular belief, the goal of chiropractic is not to “pop” the back. Most joints in the body will make a popping sound if they are moved a certain amount. The noise is caused by a carbon dioxide bubble that forms within the joint fluid. Making this sound does no harm, nor does it provide any benefit.

The goal of chiropractic is to restore normal alignment to the spine and restore normal motion to joints that are moving less than they should. This is accomplished using various procedures, collectively called chiropractic adjustments. All adjustments move the joints a certain amount. If they move the joint enough, there will be an accompanying popping sound. If they move the joint less than that amount there won’t. Improvement in joint alignment and motion does not require the popping sound.

When an untrained individual tries to mimic a chiropractic procedure and they cause a spinal joint to pop, all they have done is move a joint. The difference is they are not typically moving the joint that is malfunctioning. It is easier to move a normal joint than a malfunctioning joint. If it is not known which joint is malfunctioning, then the odds are the normally functioning joints are being moved. This can lead to gradual misalignment of those joints resulting in additional spinal problems.

You wouldn’t want an untrained individual performing surgery on you. Likewise, you shouldn’t let an untrained individual attempt to adjust your spine. Chiropractors are the most highly trained professionals in the science and art of spinal adjusting. Leave it to the experts.