

The musculoskeletal system is one of the many systems that make up the body. The primary components of the musculoskeletal system are the bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments. The bones are responsible for supporting the body and giving it structure. Some muscles in the body are not part of the musculoskeletal system. These are the visceral muscles which are a part of many of the organs and glands. The skeletal muscles are the muscles that are attached to the bones and help to move and balance the body. Tendons are tough fibrous bands that connect muscles to the bones. Ligaments are fibers that attach one bone to another.

The musculoskeletal system makes up approximately 60% of the body. It is also one of the primary reasons people go to doctors. Complaints of the musculoskeletal system are often due to injury. Injury can be sudden as in a fall or car accident, or it can be gradual as a result of any repetitive activities that over stress the body.

Bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons are all made of fibers. Bones differ from the other tissues, because they are impregnated with calcium that acts like cement and hardens the imbedded fibers. Injury to bone often takes the form of a fracture where the hard calcified fibers break under stress. Muscles, ligaments and tendons don't break as bone does, but rather the fibers tear when there is too much tension applied to them.

Musculoskeletal injuries are one of the primary reasons people visit a doctor's office. General practitioners, orthopedic specialists and chiropractors are the primary doctors who treat musculoskeletal injuries. Although physical therapists are not doctors, they also commonly treat these conditions.

Which of these providers is best suited to treat injuries to these tissues depends a lot on the type of injury and patient preference. Not long ago several studies were conducted to determine which of these provider types were the most knowledgeable about treating problems with the musculoskeletal system. These studies consisted of giving comprehensive tests to recent graduates of medical, chiropractic, and physical therapy schools. The tests were also given to staff orthopedic physicians.

To many, the results were quite surprising. The provider group that had by far the highest test scores were the chiropractic graduates. This shouldn't be that surprising if you understand the educational focus of the different groups. Chiropractic school provides more classroom hours on the musculoskeletal system than the schools of any of the other groups in this study.