

The Negative Effect of Maternal Stress on Infant Neurodevelopment and How Chiropractic Can Make a Difference

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Neurodevelopment and How Chiropractic Can Make a

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A mother's level of stress determines her baby's neurodevelopment according to a recent study published in [JAMA Pediatrics](#). Researchers at the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles looked at the relationship of maternal stress on an infant's brain development. They found that the more stress mothers experienced, the less their babies showed healthy EEG patterns of neurodevelopment. The mothers in the study "shared similar demographics, such as ethnicity, age and family income," says lead researcher Pat Levitt, "Yet, babies whose mothers reported to be stressed appeared to be less neurologically developed."

One of the purposes of this study was to detect signs of neurodevelopmental delay and to "provide an opportunity to intervene early by minimizing maternal stress."

The researchers of this study may eventually come to recommend chiropractic care once they realize that it can detect neurological stress and minimize it, through tried and tested methods that go back many decades. Indeed, many mothers have already experienced this for themselves. They are seeing the changes that chiropractic care has on the well-being of their entire family, just as the study above would suggest when we improve the body's ability to adapt to stress.

Chiropractic minimizes stress by improving the function of the nervous system, by removing interferences that delay, alter, or obstruct nervous system communication. Chiropractors have long maintained an important link between the nervous system, maternal stress, and a child's healthy development. Creating a healthy beginning during pregnancy has been the focus of ICPA chiropractors for years. The ICPA is the leading organization for chiropractic during pregnancy, and they maintain, wholeheartedly, that children's health *begins* in pregnancy. ICPA chiropractors know to honor and support maternal health as early as possible to allow for a greater, easier transition into motherhood, and to assure that children's health is considered right from the start of perinatal life.

The findings of the JAMA Pediatrics study on infant neurodevelopment opens up a fascinating discussion about the intelligence of the body. Why should neurodevelopment be hindered by maternal stress? From a chiropractic perspective, the decrease in neurodevelopment in a child whose environment appears stressful to him, is itself an intelligent adaptation of the body. In this case, the body knows to re-direct growth from higher brain function to more primitive defense mechanisms to ensure survival. This intelligence is profound considering that it is maternal stress levels, not merely the child's own stress response, that signals this adaptation. The child functions through his mother's presence.

In Pathways Magazine, we use a term from the Swahili East African Tribe which beautifully describes the mother-baby bond. It's called [Mamatoto](#), which literally means "motherbaby." In many cultures, people

see a mother and her baby, not as separate individuals, but as a cohesive unit. This cohesion begins in the womb, and carries itself forward well into childhood.

According to the article, [*Honoring the Innate Potential*](#), by Joseph Chilton Pearce, the first structure to develop in the mother's womb into a noticeable organ is the neural tube, a highly sensitive proto-nervous system which eventually forms into the infant's spinal cord and column. Out of this neural tube emerge cells that become the baby's heart and brain. Just as maternal stress can affect brain development outside the womb, the same can happen during gestation as well, via an interaction between the mother's nervous system and the child's neural tube.

The mother's nervous system, which processes all her mental, emotional, and physical experiences including stress, provides a baseline resonance frequency for the child to connect with throughout his development. The growing nervous system imitates and bonds to the mother's nervous system which helps to guide its future growth. The child comes to learn how to experience sensory impressions through an imitation of his mother's nervous system activity. Outside the womb, the same process of deep rapport occurs which took place during the perinatal period.

Mamatoto runs deep, and the vital question moving forward is how can we optimize the nervous system so our children have an ideal developmental foundation from the beginning of their lives? Chiropractic care enhances nervous system function in practical ways and you can learn more at ICPA4Kids.org. But let's first take a look at what we can do at home, using cutting edge information about our own psychology and the stress response.

One key feature of the stress response relevant especially for moms in the modern world, is what's called [*The Stress Paradox*](#) previously covered in Pathways Magazine. This article discusses how stress on one person can be interpreted and processed negatively, while for someone else it can lead to the building of strength, resilience, and character. The difference is in the attitude taken up by each individual toward the stress.

With chiropractic, the working hypothesis is that we can improve the ability of the body to process stress on the physical level, by removing interferences to the nervous system. The deeper question follows: Can these physical improvements offer a beneficial change on the emotional level as well? And can we learn to approach stress more consciously with the helping hand of chiropractic care?

Well, according to many people utilizing chiropractic care, an improved outlook on life immediately follows their chiropractic adjustments. This is already a tremendous step forward in approaching stress more positively. However, there are two reasons why the answer to the above questions is an emphatic YES.

First, the adjustment frees up the nervous system to communicate more effectively throughout the body and this alleviates tensions on our mind which might otherwise cause us to resort to a negative outlook toward stressful events. Harmful mental and emotional states may be rooted in deeper nervous system alterations of the body.

Second, chiropractic recognizes the intelligence of the body, and the practice of chiropractic was built upon this recognition. This means chiropractic care goes hand in hand with a paradigm of *supporting* the body's natural ability. Sometimes, this support alone can make the difference in freeing the mind from negative emotions and attitudes.

Too often today, intelligent manifestations of the body are mistaken as failed or dysfunctional qualities of the body. Upon a shift in perspective, what some would see as a fault or aberration, becomes a source of great strength. Every conceivable area of life can benefit from this shift in perspective. Chiropractic reminds us that intelligence is what defines our physical, living expressions, without exception.

Once we see the world, our bodies, and our families interconnected through an interplay of forces and delicate balances that are part of an inherently intelligent display of life, then we can begin to work in new, more effective ways to advance our health, our family, and our world.

Many people have never heard doctors speak in this tone or talk about an individual's health through the visual lens of an innate intelligence in the body. What this does is it changes the playing field from what's wrong with us, to what's possible for us once we optimize our innate potential. Once we change our minds in this way, we can harness a new beginning and support our children's health and development from the earliest stages of their lives.