1 Millie Mackintosh Used Hypnobirthing Techniques
2 9 Best Epilators for DIY Hair Removal
3 The Podcast You Need to Build Healthy Habits
4 This Free App Has Had 858k Downloads In Lockdown
5 Got 5-Minutes to Build a Strong Core? Try This

We earn a commission for products purchased through some links in this article.

Physios, Osteopaths & Chiropractor Are Easily Confused, So Here's The Difference

In pain? Who you gonna call?

BY EMMA PRITCHARD 11/07/2018

GETTY IMAGES

Sometimes life happens. And that is especially true when it comes to training. Despite doing these warm-up dynamic stretches, following Joslyn Thompson Rule's guide to how to use weights, and even devoting more than a couple of minutes to your cool down, you've developed an injury.

Who you gonna call?

MORE FROM WOMEN'S HEALTH

- A physiotherapist?
- An osteopath?
- Or a chiropractor?

Before you simply give up and decide to cope with the pain – you're not alone in having no idea what the difference is between the three, btw – read on.

We wanted to shed light on what it is exactly that each of these practitioners do, and who it's best to see, depending on what your complaint is. Over to the experts to explain their field.

Chiropractor vs physiotherapist vs osteopath

The Chiropractor

Catherine Quinn, President of the British Chiropractic Association

Chiropractors take a holistic approach to care, specialising in the examination, diagnosis, treatment and management of conditions of the spine and other musculoskeletal conditions.

Most common conditions they treat:

- low back pain
- neck pain

Treatments

Chiropractors use various techniques to reduce pain, improve function and

Treatments

Chiropractors use various techniques to reduce pain, improve function and increase mobility. They are best known for manual treatments including manipulation, which is a technique where a chiropractor will use their hands to free stiff or restricted joints, or mobilisation, which is the gradual moving of joints. However, chiropractors may also use other techniques including ice, heat, ultrasound, exercises and acupuncture, and may also offer lifestyle advice to help recovery and to prevent repeated episodes of back pain.

What they don't treat

If your chiropractor does not think you can be helped by chiropractic treatment, you may be referred to another health professional. For example, chiropractors do not prescribe medication, so if this is needed, you may be referred to your GP or another practitioner. As chiropractors support a joined-up, integrated approach to care, you can be confident that they will recommend the best treatment to ease your pain as quickly as possible.

Chiropractor's USP

A lot of the techniques used across chiropractic, osteopathy and physiotherapy are very similar, in particular the use of manual therapies, stretches and exercises to manage pain in the musculoskeletal system (bones, joints and muscles), and these three professions are increasingly seen as working together under the umbrella of 'physical therapies'. However, whilst chiropractors and osteopaths specialise predominantly in conditions related to the musculoskeletal system, physiotherapists frequently work with the rest of the body, often specialising in various areas to support the needs of a wider range of patients, for example, they often work with patients in hospitals following surgery.

Both chiropractors and osteopaths might take a similar approach to manage conditions such as low back pain and neck pain, as they both provide a manual approach to treatment. Chiropractors are also licensed to take x-rays, which osteopaths do not do.

The Physiotherapist

Lucy Macdonald, Octopus Clinic and member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

As part of their three- to four-year degree or masters, physiotherapists train in all the areas of physiotherapy:

- orthopaedics
- respiratory
- neurological
- elderly care
- cardio
- medical
- intensive care
- paediatrics
- Sometimes other specialisms like hands, burns and mental health

Next, physiotherapists specialise in 'musculoskeletal', which goes hand in hand with 'sports' physiotherapy.

Treatments

The undergraduate training for physiotherapists focuses on exercise-based medicine and movement facilitation with a strong bias on the patient becoming independent.

Physiotherapist's USP

An experienced chartered physiotherapist will provide very similar assessment and treatment to an experienced registered osteopath, for example. The differences, if any, at this stage come down to personal experience – what the individual clinician has chosen to specialise in over the years.

What they don't treat

Due to the array of specialisms in physiotherapy, it's worth reading the biography of a clinician when deciding who you want to see – or asking the clinic directly.

The Osteopath

Anisha Joshi, The Woodside Clinic and member of The Institute of Osteopathy

Osteopaths are trained to assess patients with orthopaedic and neurological tests, to come to an accurate diagnosis.

Treatments

What I personally love about osteopathy, is that we look at the body as a whole and with this diagnosis, we can then figure out the root cause of the problem and treat the area causing pain – using a wide range of gentle hands on techniques that focus on releasing tension, improving mobility and optimising function.

We cater each treatment to the individual patient – it's not a one-treatment-suits-all-approach.

By following this process, we get long-term results and patients often only need to come in 2-3 times a year for check-ups.

An Osteopath's USP

They undergo more than 4-5 years of training at university and are expected to do in excess of 1000 clinic hours to qualify.

Regarding the famous question of 'Who should I go and see for my injury or pain?', I'd say that it depends on the person administering the treatment. Just as it does if you're finding a doctor, dentist or hairdresser; it's about who works for you, your body and lifestyle. In the same way that we all respond differently to weight loss; our bodies will react differently to different therapists' approaches to an injury.

Experiencing an injury? Read this for more on how to get back into shape when you've had a bad injury and how to maintain strength training if you have a wrist injury.