

## Chiropractic Techniques

The following list cites the 15 most frequently used techniques by doctors of chiropractic (DCs). Following the list is a brief explanation of each manipulative/adjustive procedure. DCs can and do use various techniques to obtain favorable patient outcomes. Each chiropractic college may specialize in a limited number of techniques and typically do not teach each technique to the chiropractic student. Chiropractic graduates undergo a national board examination that requires the student to demonstrate competency in the top five manipulative/adjustive techniques plus the techniques taught at his/her chiropractic college.

This is a basic overview and only serves as a quick definition. A more complex explanation about these or many other techniques not named here can be found in the *Job Analysis of Chiropractic* published by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners, January 2000.

**Chiropractic  
Education  
"Making it Simple"**

### Most Frequently Used Techniques

Technique/Procedure	Percent of DCs Utilizing Manipulative/Adjustive Procedure
1. Diversified	95.9%
2. Extremity manipulating/adjusting	95.5%
3. Activator Methods	62.8%
4. Gonstead	58.5%
5. Cox Flexion/Distracton	58.0%
6. Thompson	55.9%
7. Sacro Occipital Technique [SOT]	41.3%
8. Applied Kinesiology	43.2%
9. NIMMO/Receptor Tonus	40.0%
10. Cranial	37.3%
11. Manipulative/Adjustive Instruments	34.5%
12. Palmer upper cervical [HIO]	28.8%
13. Logan Basic	28.7%
14. Meric	19.9%
15. Pierce-Stillwagon	17.1%

**National Association:  
American Chiropractic  
Association**  
1701 Clarendon Blvd. Suite 200  
Arlington, VA 22209  
Attention: PDR Department  
  
(703) 276-8800 (phone)  
(703) 243-2593 (fax)  
  
Visit our website for up-to-date  
information at:  
[www.acatoday.com](http://www.acatoday.com)

**American Chiropractic Association**  
Claim Solutions Work Group  
Working Together to Gain Knowledge

## Definition of Techniques

**Diversified Technique [or Full-Spine Specific (FSS)]** - This is a widely used type of chiropractic manipulation/ adjustment that includes most of the procedures taught at chiropractic schools. This technique is the most commonly used of all chiropractic techniques and is the one probably most familiar to patients. The Diversified manipulation/adjustment entails a high-velocity, low-amplitude thrust that usually results in a cavitation of a joint (quick, shallow thrusts that cause the popping noise often associated with a chiropractic manipulation/adjustment). As the name implies, the Diversified Technique can be used to treat many of the joints in the body.

**Extremity Manipulating/Adjusting** - This is the application of chiropractic manipulation/adjustment to joints other than those of the spine, i.e., shoulder, elbow, wrist/hand/finger, hip, knee, ankle/foot/toe. Examples of conditions treated by extremity manipulation/ adjustment: carpal tunnel syndrome, gait, or posture-related problems.

**Activator Method** - This is a hand-held, spring-loaded instrument-based manipulation/adjustment protocol. Instead of the manipulating/adjusting forces being delivered by hand, force is generated with the small appliance that delivers a lighter, but quicker, thrust than can be delivered by hand. Activator can be used as a primary treatment protocol for all patients or a selective method for patients who may not desire manual manipulation/adjustment or where manual manipulation/adjustment may be contraindicated.

**Gonstead Technique** - This is a specific chiropractic technique and is a variation of the Diversified technique that utilizes manipulation/adjustment by hand that

usually results in joint cavitation. X-ray analysis, palpation, and temperature gradient studies may be used in clinical decision-making (i.e., what segment(s) to manipulate/adjust).

**Cox Flexion/Distract** - This is a specific chiropractic technique that uses mechanical and hands-on manipulation/ adjustment utilizing a special table where the spine is tractioned and flexed forward. This technique is primarily utilized to treat cervical and lumbar disc herniations, non-disc spinal disorders, and to increase mobility of spinal joints.

**Thompson Technique** - This is a specific chiropractic method and is a variation of the Diversified technique that uses a special table with several segments called drop pieces. These segments can be cocked up a fraction of an inch, so when the thrust is delivered, the table will drop this fraction of an inch. The drop pieces assist the thrust while minimizing the force used for the manipulation/ adjustment. Cavitation of the joint may or may not occur.

**Sacro Occipital Technique (SOT)** - This is a specific chiropractic technique that uses triangular-shaped blocks usually placed under the pelvis of the prone patient to treat problems identified in the low back. Low force, slow pressure types of manipulations/adjustments may be used to address joint problems identified in the skull. SOT may be used as an exclusive treatment technique or as an adjunct method of patient management.

**Applied Kinesiology** - This is an approach to chiropractic treatment in which several specific procedures may be combined. Diversified manipulative/ adjusting techniques may be used with nutritional interventions, together with light massage of various points referred to as neurolymphatic and neurovascular points.

Clinical decision-making is often based on testing and evaluating muscle strength.

**NIMMO/Receptor Tonus** - This is a specific chiropractic technique based on the presumption that muscles are responsible for causing abnormal joint function. NIMMO addresses muscular problems, usually called trigger points, by applying pressure on the point(s) for variable amounts of time (usually a few seconds) thus allowing the muscle to relax and acquire its normal length. This procedure allows the bone(s) to which the muscle(s) attach to move normally to restore proper joint function.

**Cranial Technique** - This is not a specific chiropractic technique, but possibly several techniques using the application of chiropractic manipulation/adjustment to joints of the skull (similar to the SOT technique previously mentioned). Since individual anatomy of skull joints is different, the styles of manipulation/ adjustment are different and no cavitation occurs.

**Manipulative/Adjustive Instruments** - These are techniques, other than Activator, that include the use of instruments to deliver a manipulation/adjustment to the patient. Many of these procedures are used specifically in the upper cervical region, but not all. Precision of the direction of the thrust is claimed to be the advantage of these techniques.

**Palmer Upper Cervical (HIO)** - This is a specific chiropractic technique used only to manipulate/adjust joint dysfunctions in the upper cervical spine. The theory is that treatment of this area may also address problems throughout the entire body of the patient. Usually no cavitation occurs. X-ray analysis is commonly used for making clinical decisions (the segment(s) to manipulate/adjust) along with palpation.

**Logan Basic Technique** - This is a specific chiropractic technique in which light pressure is applied to the sacrum. Light force is concurrently applied to various spinal levels to reduce pain/symptoms and restore muscle balance.

**Meric System** - This is not a specific chiropractic technique, but refers more to clinical decision-making regarding what spinal levels to manipulate/adjust. Spinal segments are manipulated/adjusted (usually with a diversified technique) corresponding to the nerves that supply the area of patient symptomatology.

**Pierce-Stillwagon** - This is a specific chiropractic technique that uses side-posture manipulation/adjustment in the low back and prone manipulation/ adjustment in the cervical spine. X-ray analysis is commonly used for making clinical decisions on which spinal level(s) to manipulate/adjust.

## Where Can I Get More Information?

Please visit these websites:

- National Board of Chiropractic Examiners at: [www.nbce.org](http://www.nbce.org)
- Foundation for Chiropractic Education at: [www.fcer.org](http://www.fcer.org)
- Any accredited Chiropractic College/ Education Department at: [www.l5s1.com/license.html](http://www.l5s1.com/license.html)

ACA is the largest national professional organization representing doctors of chiropractic.

<i>Distribution Date</i>
<i>August 2003</i>