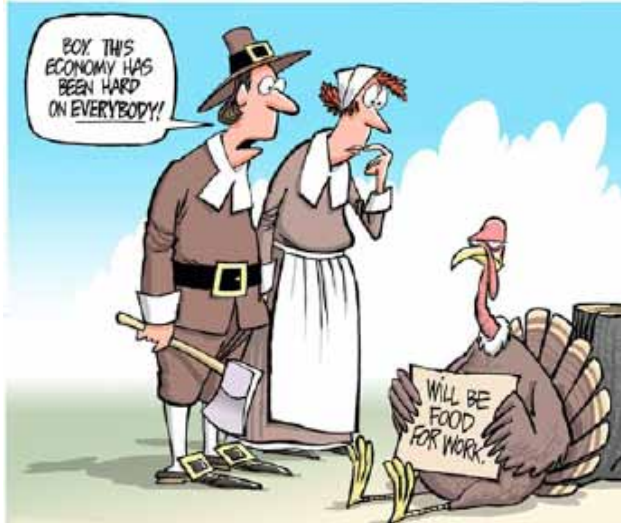




# It's not all *doom and gloom*



**T**his has been a very tough year for most! An ATM recently swallowed my debit card and gave me an IOU, and I even received a pre-declined

credit card in the mail! So I decided to go to the bank for a loan and they said, "Hey what a coincidence! That's what we were going to ask you!"

Going to the teller didn't help either as she just handed me a note saying: "This is a robbery!"

It's a year where huge paper companies have folded, big bra manufacturers went bust and even corset firms felt the squeeze.

I've always maintained that the only way to survive a crumbling economy is to try to keep a sense of humour.

A little difficult you might say when the economy is so bad that Pick n Pay are considering producing 1/2 ply toilet paper and McDonalds are looking at introducing the new 1/4 Ouncer!

But hey it's not all doom and gloom because 2012 is around the corner and I have some "fun" predictions about what headlines we might encounter

in this coming year:

- End of the world postponed indefinitely till debts repaid
- Hot wheels stock trades higher than GM
- Cricket captains play "rock, paper, scissors" instead of tossing coin at opening of test match
- KFC promotes an empty box combo, where the novelty is you 'Kan't Find (the) Chicken'.
- Ethiopian mother heard telling her children: "Finish your meal! Don't you know there are starving children in the US?"
- Telkom and Eskom announce a loss
- People revert back to using the sun to get a tan!
- Four major CEOs seen playing miniature crazy golf

## Is it a trapped *nerve*?

**Joan is a 77-year-old** patient of mine. She has had recurrent neck pain and stiffness over the years, but she recently presented to the clinic with severe pain in both her shoulders, shoulder blades and arms, which was worse at night when resting.

She was also getting pins and needles in the outer part of her hands and was finding she was weaker and clumsier when handling things, and experienced difficulty lifting up her arms.

X-rays of her neck showed severe degenerative spondylosis (arthritis) in the lower three levels of her neck, with loss of the disc spaces (cushions between the vertebrae) and narrowing of the neural foramina (the spaces between the vertebrae where the nerves run out).

Wear and tear in a cervical spine (neck) can cause a narrowing like this as the vertebrae get closer together and can change shape (spurring). If a nerve gets pinched or trapped, it will become inflamed. The result is that you then have a fat, puffy, inflamed nerve sitting in a narrowed space.

The nerve is made up of two parts-sensory (providing sensation to the arm) and motor (supplying the muscles of the arm). The sensory part is bigger than the motor part, so often there will be sensory changes initially. These include pain, either in the arm or into the shoulder or shoulder blade and/or numbness/pins and needles often in the hand or part of the arm.

If the motor part of the nerve becomes irritated then there can also be weakness in certain muscles, as well as involuntary twitching in muscles (fasciculation). These symptoms will often

be worse with certain positions, i.e. looking up because the holes where the nerves run out are narrowed in these positions.

They may also be worse when trying to carry, because the nerve is then

being stretched and irritated. It might seem strange that they are worse with rest at night, but this is because inflammation tends to be worse at night and in the early morning.

The object of conservative physical therapy is to reduce inflammation around the nerve root (where it runs out from the spine) and gently create movement around the vertebrae, thus making more space for the nerve. This can take several treatments depending on severity and requires patience because a nerve can take up to eight weeks or longer to repair properly once it is 'untrapped'.

In Joan's case it took eight weeks, but she has almost reached full recovery. If symptoms do not respond within this time period then it is advisable to do an MRI to further investigate the severity of the problem as surgery may be required as a last resort to decompress the nerve.





## Doodles' nerve

**Doodles is a magnificent** 11-year-old Alaskan Malamute. He recently presented to the clinic with progressive, severe lameness in his left front leg that had begun four weeks earlier.

Examination suggested he had a trapped nerve in his left lower neck due to some mild wear and tear apparent on x-rays. After just over two weeks and six treatments he showed almost complete recovery with no sign of pain or lameness.

It is always important to consider the possibility that lameness is a result of a problem in the spine and can be due to a trapped nerve (radicular pain) or an irritated joint or muscle referring pain into the leg (referred pain).

Other signs to look out for are favouring one leg, changes in gait, reluctance to do normal activity, chewing paw, or twitching in muscles of the leg (fasciculation).

## Take care of your spine

**W**hen it comes to spinal trauma and health we can all be guilty of procrastination. So many of us have suffered whiplash after car accidents, falls or sports injuries, sprained our backs after lifting something heavy, or had stiff necks/backs after sitting at the PC too long or due to excessive stress.

We often wander around with chronic or recurrent back/neck pain, stiffness, migraines, headaches and other referred spinal related pains. We adapt to our symptoms, perhaps medicating and never seeking help to find the true source or alleviate them.

It's all well and good but leaving our spinal health to luck and fate, and hoping that everything will be alright, is a sure way to ensure that eventually it's not. We all know what happens when we ignore a strange noise coming from our car? Yes, eventually the wheels come off – literally!

It's the same with spinal health. Ignoring ongoing or worsening symptoms is a recipe for disaster. It's amazing how most serious spinal problems

can be traced back to some trauma, sometimes even in childhood or at birth.

Prevention is always better than cure, but unfortunately we have not been educated that way.

A good rule of thumb is that if you or your children have a spinal injury or trauma, then take the time to get it checked, because five, ten or twenty years later, what seems fairly arbitrary now, will be a big problem then.

### No excuses

The excuse 'we didn't know anything about chiropractic in our day, or chiropractors in our day were 'barbaric', is no longer applicable.

A whiplash injury, for example, may not actually cause any immediate problems but can present itself five years later as severe neck pain or a pinched nerve, all of which can be prevented if the spinal injury had been properly checked and rehabilitated.

I see many responsible parents who bring their children for a check up after a bad fall, some of whom I happily examine and send away because their spine has not been damaged.

However, on the other end of the scale I see children who had a fall five years ago and have suffered from recurring pain, stiffness and headaches ever since and who are now busy developing and growing with a chronically worsening spinal problem, that will eventually result in spinal degeneration by their mid twenties to thirties. All of which could have been prevented with a check up.

Spines are mechanical structures made up of over a hundred joints and multiple muscles and ligaments. Encased within is our whole central nervous system which governs and regulates every little process within our bodies.

Spines are susceptible to damage and spinal health tends to degenerate, but by the same token, spinal health can also be maintained and protected.

Of course not all spinal joint damage is reversible, but most of it is if treated promptly and correctly.

As one of my younger patients once said to me: "A spine is for life, not just for Christmas!" Try to look after yours the best you can.

## THE CLINIC AND US

18 BROOK CRESCENT, NOORDHOEK

We run a dedicated clinic in the heart of beautiful Noordhoek, away from the hustle and bustle. I do treat both people and animals (oh yes in separate rooms if you're asking). If you need any information, please ring Carri-Anne on 021 789 1546. Feel free to leave a message if no-one answers, we promise to get back to you soonest. You are also welcome to email me (drblack@iafrica.com) anytime if you have any queries or questions and I will endeavour to answer you as soon as possible.

Oh, and if you're wondering who Gabriella is ... she's my black and white Newfoundland dog, so you can't book an appointment with her (unless you have a handful of tasty treats!) You can check out her website [www.gabriellasumbrella.com](http://www.gabriellasumbrella.com).

**From all of us, have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**

**Dr David Black**  
B.Sc. DC A.E.C.C (UK)

Chiropractic  
for  
Humans  
and Animals

Tel/Fax: 021 789 1546  
Email: [drblack@iafrica.com](mailto:drblack@iafrica.com)  
[www.gabriellasumbrella.com](http://www.gabriellasumbrella.com)