OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

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The Healing Effects of Traction

Presented by:

Introduction

Spinal traction is a type of manual therapy in which parts of your spinal column (i.e., your vertebrae) are gently pulled away from each other, which creates a small separation in the joint surfaces between your spinal bones. Spinal traction is a simple and effective healing technique that has been used by chiropractors since the profession's earliest days to help mobilize spinal joint tissues and promote optimal spine health.

Spinal traction may be particularly helpful in treating cervical and lumbar spine problems and traction therapy may produce even better results when it is used in combination with chiropractic adjustments. According to Dr. David Petersen, author of *Chiropractic Technique*, traction techniques are believed to assist chiropractic adjustments by relieving joint compression, allowing your spine's supporting tissues to fully rest, and opening your intervertebral foramina, or the gaps though which your spinal nerve roots - offshoots of your spinal cord - pass.[1]

How it Works

Spinal traction is, in most cases, a painless procedure that may be performed manually (i.e., by your doctor) or mechanically, using a mechanized table or device. Some chiropractors may use a combination of manual and mechanical techniques to achieve specific treatment results. Traction can be static (i.e., without movement) or rhythmic and fast or slow, and it can involve either strong or gentle forces.

Spinal traction typically involves three distinct movement phases or grades of movement. The first phase produces little apparent joint gapping, or separation, as only enough traction is applied to match the compressive forces - from your muscles and adhesive internal joint structures - acting on your spinal joints. The second phase produces a tightening in the tissues that surround and protect your joints as "slack" in your joints is taken up. The final phase of spinal traction, which requires more force than the previous two phases, produces a therapeutic stretching effect on the tissues that cross your spinal joints.

QUESTION:
What are the principal treatment goals of Spinal Traction?

A) Relieve pain
B) Restore normal range of motion
C) Build body muscle

ANSWER:
A) and B)

TRUE OR FALSE:
Spinal traction is only performed manually.

ANSWER:
False: A mechanized table or device can also be used

QUESTION:
Spine-related problems that may benefit from traction are....

A) disc protrusion
B) degenerative disc disease
C) joint dysfunction
D) all of the above

ANSWER:
D) all of the above

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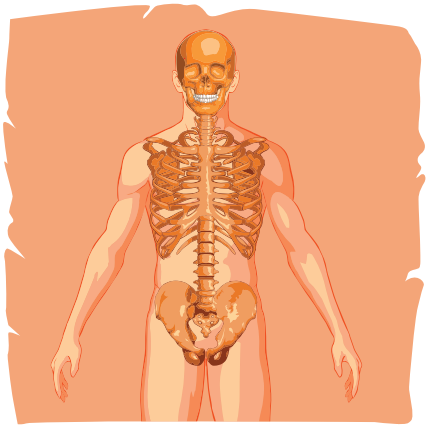
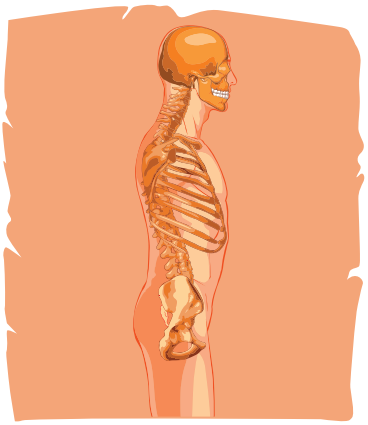
Treatment Goals

The principle treatment goal of spinal traction is to create prolonged or intermittent separation of your spinal joints to achieve normal and pain-free spinal ranges of motion (i.e., to be able to bend and twist your spine in all directions without experiencing pain). Other important treatment goals for spinal traction include: decreasing muscle spasms, restoring proper tissue tone and pliability, correcting muscle imbalances, and stabilizing unstable spinal segments.

Effects of Traction

Spinal traction may produce numerous beneficial health effects, notes Peterson, such as therapeutic stretching of the muscles and ligaments that protect your spine, reduced restrictions in your spine's facet joints (the joints that allow for the greatest range of motion in your spine), increased circulation, or blood flow, to your spine and its supporting structures, and favorable alterations in spinal disc pressures. Other beneficial effects of spinal traction may include pain relief, reduced spinal compression forces, and improved venous and lymphatic flow.[2]





Who Can Benefit From Traction?

Your chiropractor can counsel you on your specific health problem and whether you might be a good candidate for spinal traction. Spine-related problems that may benefit from traction techniques include disc protrusion, degenerative disc disease, and joint dysfunction.[3]

A study published in the Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics states that spinal traction, in combination with specific exercises and chiropractic adjustments, can have a positive effect on tension headaches.[4]

Another study, published in 2000 in the journal Manual Therapy, notes that spinal traction is likely to help patients experiencing acute (i.e., less than 6 week's duration) radicular pain - pain that radiates along the sensory distribution of a nerve and is caused by a problem in your lumbar spine, such as a disc herniation or bone spur - with accompanying neurological problems.[5] Traction therapy may be particularly helpful for elderly individuals, especially when high-velocity, low-amplitude chiropractic adjustments may not be appropriate.

Quote to Inspire

The contented man is never poor; the discontented never rich

~ George Eliot

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