

## **DECOMPRESSION THERAPY – What is it Really????**

Spinal decompression is traction. It has been used for many years and is covered by many insurance companies. The use of decompression therapy is FDA approved in the category of traction for the treatment of back pain. It is performed by a mechanical force creating a distraction of soft tissue or joint separation. Decompression/traction is controlled through the amount of force, length of time and angle of pull.

Decompression/traction is a passive modality that may help people who suffer with chronic pain initially overcome an acute flare up. Due to the chronicity of many back conditions, active rehabilitation and staying consistent with a home exercise program offers the best long term outcomes.

One study attempted to support solely decompression/traction therapy. 219 patients received decompression/traction therapy but some also received epidural injection, bracing, oral medication and job modification. 86% of the patients had a favorable outcome for the first 90 days. Unfortunately, no one was followed up for outcome assessment beyond 3 months, thus true results for relieving chronic pain could not be reported.

If traction/decompression is indicated for your condition, remember that it is a covered benefit under most insurance plans. Insurance companies have instructed providers to bill under a specific code when using a traction/decompression machine. Many providers do not want to bill these services to insurance under the allowed codes because of the limited reimbursement that will be received so they attempt to have potential clients sign cash contracts ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,000. If you are considering traction/decompression as a treatment option, let the provider know you have insurance that covers this service when it is billed under the appropriate and allowed billing codes and there is no reason to have to pay cash or sign any type of contract for such services.

Remember decompression/traction is a passive procedure; it does nothing to assist in strengthening and reconditioning trunk and core muscles. Chronic conditions such as degenerative disc disease, arthritis, spinal stenosis and bulging discs are conditions that have some permanent instability. Since we are faced with a compressive force of gravity all day long, after a few treatments of decompression/traction, we must progress to conditioning our supportive muscles. You must be actively involved in taking care of yourself.

Contact Lou Rossi, DC and Matt Trnka, PT at 330-723-2225 if you have questions regarding chronic back pain, self management of your condition or decompression/traction.