

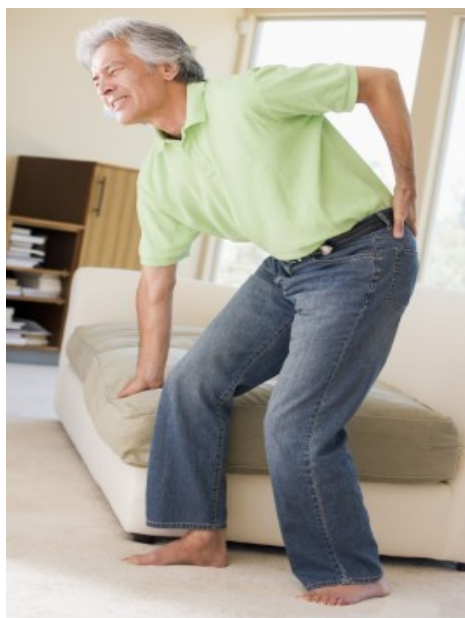
Spinal Decompression: The Back Surgery Alternative



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Introduction:

Back problems are extremely common, effecting approximately 80% of people at some point in their lives. The majority of back pain episodes are self-limiting and get better regardless of treatment. But more serious and chronic back conditions, especially those related to bulging (also called herniated or protruding) and/or degenerated spinal discs are often unresponsive to most forms of treatment and can become quite debilitating.



Because of the severity of symptoms that such conditions produce, and the ineffectiveness of commonly-prescribed medications and other treatments, people suffering with disc-related pain often find themselves considering surgery as the only means to resume normal lives.

While surgery is really the only option in some cases, many experts have concluded that this form of treatment is extremely over-utilized in the United States. Worse yet, the long-term failure rate of disc surgery has been estimated to be as high as 50%, with many people experiencing as bad or worse symptoms than what they had before surgery.



Even though many disc pain sufferers are aware of these dismal statistics, intense pain with no relief over time convinces many to take a chance on back surgery despite the relatively poor prospects for a good outcome. In other cases, some surgeons may fail to give prospective patients realistic expectations, and patients go into surgery thinking it is a guaranteed cure, only to be bitterly disappointed by less than optimal results.

Until recently, there really was not a good, reliable treatment that could be considered a real alternative to surgery for disc pain sufferers. Medication, spinal injections, physical therapy, and most other treatments merely provided temporary symptom relief and failed to make any significant changes in the underlying cause of the symptoms – the damaged disc(s).

That has changed with the introduction of spinal decompression. For the first time, there is a non-invasive means of directly addressing the damage to spinal discs. With some high-tech advancements to spinal traction (which was used for many years in disc cases with mixed results), spinal decompression produces suction forces within spinal discs that draws in bulging disc material, as well as increases the flow of fluid and nutrients into the disc which promote disc healing.

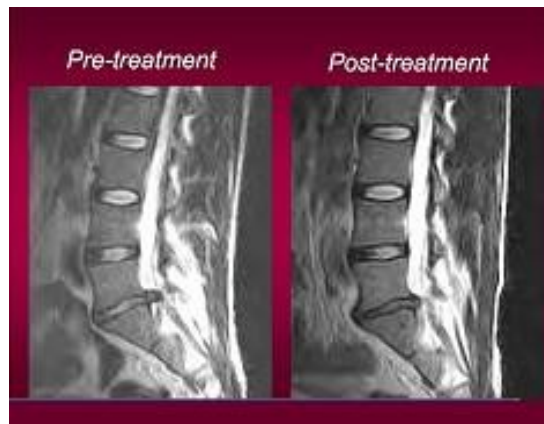
The net result of this suction effect is a treatment that not only eases the symptoms of bulging and degenerated discs, but can actually to a large extent correct the damage to the discs, to provide long-term restoration of disc health and allows patients to return to normal activities.

What You Need To Know About Spinal Decompression:

As just discussed, spinal decompression has proven to be highly effective in the vast majority of cases in not only reducing (and often eliminating) symptoms, but actually correcting disc bulging and improving disc health. But there has been some controversy regarding this form of treatment.

We have heard some well-intentioned, but poorly-informed doctors express the opinion that spinal decompression is nothing more than an expensive "band-aid" and that it does not actually produce any significant structural change in the discs. These misinformed doctors believe that even if it does help reduce symptoms, it can't possibly produce any real disc healing, so the patients will eventually need surgery anyway.

Obviously, these doctors are entitled to their opinions, but these opinions are not based in fact. Pre and post spinal decompression treatment MRI comparison studies have conclusively shown that "true" spinal decompression (what constitutes "true" spinal decompression will be discussed later), can and does produce retraction of bulging disc material and actual disc healing in many cases. Although this effect is seen with a few other forms of disc treatment (some types of physical therapy and certain chiropractic techniques), no other treatment has been shown to reliably produce this result.



How Does Spinal Decompression Work?

Spinal decompression is a "high-tech" version of spinal traction. Spinal traction has been used for many years in the treatment of back pain, but its results always fell short when it came to the treatment of spinal disc herniations and degeneration. Why? Well, when you start to pull on the spine with regular traction, the muscles begin to contract and resist the treatment.

Because of this, there are two problems in treating disc-related pain with regular traction:

First, because the muscles are contracting as the traction pulls, this often irritates and can even damage already sensitive muscles, *producing even greater pain!*

Second, because of the strong contraction of the muscles, it is much more difficult to produce separation of the spinal bones, and to reduce the pressure in the discs enough to make any significant changes in the amount of disc bulging.

Spinal Decompression Is A Type of Traction, BUT It Is Different From Regular Traction!

"True" spinal decompression machines use computer-controlled motors to modulate the traction pull in such a way that it does not provoke significant muscle contraction around the spinal area being treated. Because there is little to no muscle resistance to the treatment, spinal decompression is much more comfortable and has a

much greater positive effect on the spinal discs than regular traction.

Spinal Decompression Produces Negative Pressure (Suction) Inside The Disc!

Experiments on regular traction showed that although traction does decrease the pressure inside the disc and may provide benefits in terms of muscle stretching and joint mobilization, it does not produce enough decompressive effect in the discs to significantly reduce disc bulging.

In contrast, "true" spinal decompression machines can produce strong negative pressure, or suction as you probably know it, inside the discs. This allows for the bulging disc material to be pulled back towards the center of the disc. In effect, it's almost like someone stuck a drinking straw into the center of the disc and sucked the disc bulge back in.

The other benefit of the suction force produced by spinal decompression is that fluid and nutrients are drawn back into the disc, to promote disc healing and regeneration. In the case of degenerated discs, this increase in fluid can help restore disc height and reduce pressure on arthritic spinal joint surfaces.

With time and repeated treatments, the disc wall gradually heals and stabilizes to be able to keep the bulging material contained, resulting in long-term correction.

What Is "True" Spinal Decompression?



When the first studies on spinal decompression started being published and the results were so positive, there was a huge rush by medical equipment manufacturers to capitalize on this new market. Because the time and cost of developing a true spinal decompression system that does not violate existing patents can be considerable, many manufacturers have taken a much simpler, although rather deceptive, approach to getting their spinal decompression machines on the market - they simply renamed their traction machines as "spinal decompression" machines!

But how could they possibly get away with this? Well, as we've stated earlier, spinal decompression machines are a type of traction machine. Furthermore, the Food and Drug Administration has formally classified spinal decompression machines as traction machines. Because of this huge legal loophole, there are many regular traction machines on the market that have been "re-labeled" as spinal decompression machines.

There are arguably only a few "true" spinal decompression machines that have the technology to actually reduce disc pressure sufficiently to pull disc bulges back in and thereby produce long-term correction. Of those, fewer yet have produced any research to prove the effectiveness of their machines. Instead, most manufacturers have taken a "me too" approach, insisting that their traction machines do exactly the same thing as the more advanced spinal decompression systems without doing ANY research on their machines (not even a single case study!) to support that assertion.

But wait a minute! Wouldn't the FDA crack down on these unsupported claims? Well, in this instance, the answer is "no". The FDA only requires that the machine manufacturers demonstrate safety and effectiveness. Since these decompression "knock-offs" are classified by the FDA as traction machines (just as true decompression systems are), they are FDA cleared as safe and effective for what traction machines do. As stated earlier, regular traction does produce some beneficial effects, but those effects are nowhere near what can be produced with true spinal decompression

systems.

Adding to the confusion, many facilities using the "renamed" traction machines will often quote statistics from several research studies to support the use of their machines that were actually done on OTHER MACHINES ("true" decompression machines)!

For example, one of our spinal decompression competitors in the San Antonio market has an extensive research section on his website, but only one reference listed on his website has anything to do with the machine he is using!

The reference that does apply to the machine he is using did show symptomatic improvements in most of the test cases, but the average reduction in symptoms was only about 36% - about what can be expected for a regular traction machine!

There are a few good "true" decompression machines on the market and we looked at several machines before selecting the one to use in our San Antonio office. Although the "Vax-D" machine was the first on the market, and is the most-researched of the true spinal decompression machines, we have chosen to provide decompression services using the newer DRX9000.

Other Issues With Spinal Decompression Promoters:

While we're on the subject of dishonest marketing tactics, it should be acknowledged that the manufacturers and promoters of even the "true" spinal decompression systems are not without their faults.

For example, the company that makes the DRX9000, the machine that we use, claimed that the original idea for the technology came from NASA, based on their observations of what happened with astronauts in space flight. Supposedly, when astronauts who suffered from back pain found that their disc problems were cured by being in zero gravity. This made a dramatic and appealing "hook" for

advertising purposes.

This "fact" about the benefits of space travel on bad discs was repeated many times in advertisements and patient information materials by decompression doctors all over the world (embarrassingly, including us!), until it came to light that it was a complete fabrication by a clever marketing person. This is but one example of the questionable marketing that has been used for spinal decompression by even the makers of the best decompression systems on the market.

The various unscrupulous advertising that has been done in the past by the spinal decompression industry has led to numerous lawsuits and fraud charges being leveled by various regulatory agencies. The silly part is, the vast majority of the fictitious claims and the legal actions surrounding them had little to do with the actual effectiveness of spinal decompression. They were more "fluff" than anything else.

Fortunately, the makers of "true" spinal decompression systems have redirected their efforts away from trying to come up with catchy advertising and have focused on doing research to prove the effectiveness of their machines. The current research available on the spinal decompression system we use can be reviewed on our website at:

<http://www.spinaldecompressionsanantonio.net/research.html>

What Kinds Of Problems Can Be Treated With Spinal Decompression?



As mentioned earlier, spinal decompression is the up and coming “treatment of choice” for disc bulges (also known as disc herniations, disc protrusions and “slipped discs”), as well as disc degeneration and the conditions related to them.

Among the symptoms and disc-related conditions that can usually be quickly relieved (symptoms usually noticeably improve within 3 to 5 treatment sessions performed over a time period of one to two weeks) are:

- Back Pain
- Sciatica (Leg and Buttock Pain)
- Spinal Stenosis
- Muscle Tightness and Spasm

Beyond the fact that spinal decompression typically provides

excellent, long-term relief of pain and symptoms, in most cases it provides sufficient disc healing to allow patients to return to their favorite activities without significant risk of a recurrence of symptoms.



Who Is NOT A Good Candidate For Spinal Decompression Treatment?

There are actually relatively few reasons that we must exclude a patient from spinal decompression treatment. There are a few rare conditions that are absolute contraindications to performing spinal decompression treatment.

These include:

- Active Spinal Cancer Or Infection.
- Severe Osteoporosis (Sufficient To Cause Serious Risk Of Spinal Fracture).
- Spinal Instability.
- Pregnancy (Due To The Use Of Tight Harnesses That Would Compress The Abdomen).
- Metal Or Other Surgical Implantation in the Area of The Spine to be Treated.*

*Implantation in other areas of the spine do not contraindicate spinal decompression. For example, a fusion with metal plates in the cervical spine does not prevent us from performing spinal decompression in the lumbar spine.

*****Important Caution To Prospective Spinal Decompression Patients In The San Antonio Area*****

It has come to our attention that a few spinal decompression providers in the San Antonio and South Texas area are performing decompression on patients who have surgical implantation in the part of the spine being treated. This is goes against the recommendations by the manufacturers of all of the spinal decompression equipment currently on the market, and is a violation of the FDA Clearance for the decompression machines. This practice is potentially VERY DANGEROUS and could result in serious permanent injury! We can only speculate on the reasons why these providers would choose to ignore this contraindication, but we strongly advise anyone who does have this contraindication to avoid spinal decompression and cease treatment if it they have already started.

Other Reasons We May Choose To Exclude A Patient From Our Treatment Program:

From time to time, we opt to not accept a given patient who is suitable for decompression, or we may discontinue treatment on a patient after treatment has started. The primary reasons for this involve situations in which the patient is either unwilling or unable to comply with treatment recommendations, such as:

- Scheduling Difficulties / Repeated Missed Appointments
- Failure To Follow Home Care Recommendations
- Being Uncooperative With Office Policies / Being Disrespectful Of Staff Or Other Patients

These situations are pretty rare, but they do occur and we do reserve the right to refuse to accept a patient or to dismiss a patient from care.

Treatment Costs And Insurance:

While questions regarding the cost of decompression treatment and the insurance coverage for it are among the most common inquiries we receive, this is not the appropriate venue for a discussion of these issues.

There is considerable variation in the severity and extent of disc problems from one patient to the next, and therefore the prescribed amount of spinal decompression treatment will vary quite a bit. Likewise, insurance policies and coverage can vary greatly, so getting any reliable estimate on cost and insurance coverage simply must be done on a case by case basis once the patient has been evaluated. For this reason, we provide our spinal decompression qualifying

evaluations free of charge.

The one thing we can say in general about the financial issues concerning spinal decompression treatment is the patient's out of pocket cost for spinal decompression is usually less than for surgical treatment (and associated follow-up).

In Conclusion:

Spinal decompression offers a superior alternative to back surgery for the majority of patients suffering from disc related back pain, sciatica, and other symptoms.

Unlike other treatments, spinal decompression produces actual correction of disc bulging and improves disc hydration and nutrition to enhance disc thickness and reduce compression on spinal joint surfaces and increase space around spinal nerves.

Besides the advantages of safety and effectiveness of spinal decompression as compared to surgery, spinal decompression treatment does not require hospitalization, nor extended periods of bed rest during the recovery period. In most cases, treatment can be provided without causing disruption of a patient's work schedule.

When all costs and insurance coverage is considered, spinal decompression treatment usually works out to be much more affordable than surgery, so by comparison to any other type of treatment for disc-related pain, decompression is an excellent value.

If you have been suffering with disc-related pain and disability, and thought surgery was your only option, we highly recommend that you contact us to find out if spinal decompression is a viable option for you.

It's your choice...

Living in pain:



Or getting back in the game:



Help is now available in the San Antonio area...

For more information and to schedule a no-cost, no-obligation consultation with one of our spinal decompression specialists, please call:

South Texas Non-Surgical Spinal Center

(210) 408-7888