

# Decompression Therapy

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is Decompression Therapy and how will it help me?**

Simply described, this is a sophisticated traction device. During each session, there are multiple cycles of distraction (stretching) and relaxation. Old-fashioned Traction would stretch the spine to maximum capacity and hold the stretch for an extended duration. Decompression Therapy is different because the wave-like motion of stretching and relaxing fosters a phenomenon called “imbibition”. Since the discs have no direct blood supply it makes them difficult to heal, however; the pumping action (imbibition) achieved by Decompression actually draws the blood and nutrients into the disc, which helps it heal from the inside out. Also the dramatic decrease of pressure in the disc can foster the drawing in of a bulge and help take pressure off a “pinched” spinal nerve.

### **What should I expect during the treatment?**

The computer system applies a gentle force then releases it approximately every minute throughout the session. The total treatment time is usually less than 20 minutes. Most patients report feeling a gentle stretching and a sense of relief during the session.

### **What will I feel like after the treatment?**

This varies for each person. Some people report feeling taller and lighter and relieved of their pain. Others have reported feeling sore immediately after the treatment or the following day. If one does experience soreness, we recommend icing the area for 10-15 minutes. Soreness does not mean that the treatment was ineffective or has exacerbated your condition. It is simply caused from stretching tight, guarded muscles that have been restricted for an extended period of time.

### **How long will it take to get out of pain?**

Although most patients report dramatic reduction of the pain within as few as five treatments, an injured spinal disc needs time to heal. This is why we urge you to follow your prescribed treatment plan. We ask that patients commit to completing a minimum of 12 sessions. Even for those that obtain pain relief early on, the remaining sessions will speed the healing of the injured disc and help them to return to their regular activities sooner.

### **What about exercises and stretching?**

Many people wonder if working out or performing yoga after decompression therapy will “undo” the benefits of the treatment. The answer is no. Exercise recommendations will vary with each patient based on their pain level.

At some point during your course of treatment, Dr. Bissell may prescribe physical therapy to stabilize the supporting spinal muscles. We have found through our experience that consistent exercise is one of the keys to a full recovery.

## **What if I don't feel better after a full course of 12 treatments?**

12 treatments is only an average number to get results; some chronic or severe cases may require more sessions. If the passive Decompression Therapy treatments fail to give satisfactory relief (> 50% reduction in pain) within the first set of 12, it is usually due to one of three reasons:

1. The damage is too extensive for complete healing. This can be due to extensive arthritis, stenosis, multiple herniations, pinched nerve roots and congenital anomalies. In these cases a referral to another doctor or further tests may be needed.
2. Daily activities present stresses that continue to aggravate the injury or excess weight is stressing the back. In this case work modification, caloric reduction and/or bracing may be considered. In many people the spinal muscles are too weak to meet their daily demands. Structured exercise (i.e. Physical Therapy) and/or weight-loss is often the only real solution.
3. Passive treatments alone are not enough to complete the healing process. Typically 80% of patients will report good- to excellent relief by the 8-10<sup>th</sup> treatment. If progress has reached a plateau, physical therapy exercises will usually help, as they are often the missing component to the last stages of healing.

## **Will my pain go away for good?**

Most patients do find long-term relief or effective management of their pain when they complete the entire program of treatments. Spinal discs can have a 300-day healing cycle so an ongoing commitment to healing is crucial. The disc is still healing long after you have completed your prescribed course of therapies. Following through with Dr. Bissell's recommended lifestyle changes, being consistent with the home exercise program and periodic visits to our office will help in maintaining one's spinal health and reduce the probability of reoccurrence.