How Helpful Are Inversion Tables for Back Pain?

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Inversion Table for Back Pain

Does back pain have you hunched over in discomfort? You are not alone.

Approximately 80% of adults will experience back pain at some point in their lives. Chronic back pain is also the most common reason for people to call in sick to work.

But there is a new treatment for back pain that is turning the traditional approach upside down quite literally. This treatment is known as inversion therapy, and while it is not without its detractors and skeptics, some people are reporting positive results in their own management of back pain.

An Upside-Down Approach to Back Pain: What Are Inversion Tables?

Throughout your day, your spine and muscles bears the full force of gravity. All that pressure and strain may lead to muscle pain and spasms, and even poor posture and poor spinal health, that may all lead to back pain.

Inversion tables, which are a form of inversion therapy, seek to reverse that. An inversion table is basically a platform that you lie on which then tilts you backward and upside down with your head lower than the rest of your body. By doing this, it reverses all the strain that gravity has put on your spine.

It will allegedly “relieve pressure on the discs and nerve roots in the spine and increase the space between vertebrae” in your back, reports Harvard Medical School. “Proponents claim that inversion table therapy not only relieves back pain but also improves posture, preserves height, increases flexibility, stimulates blood flow to the brain and scalp, corrects the position of abdominal organs and relieves varicose veins.”

How Do Inversion Tables Help Back Pain and Spinal Health?

The effects of an inversion table may be similar to physical manipulation or a massage of your spine, helping to decompress your spine and relax the muscles that may be linked to your chronic back pain. Some inversion table benefits may include:

- Inversion therapy may help to open up your back and spine after days, months or even years of gravity compression. This, in turn, can help relax your back and ease discomfort. If your muscles are spasming because of tightness, which is a leading cause of back pain, inversion therapy can be a beneficial, non-invasive approach.
- Inversion therapy may give your muscles and spine time to rest and recover. When you are on an inversion table, the upside-down angle can ease the pressure that your spine and other weight-bearing joints have on them, thus giving them time to heal and recuperate.

If your back pain is specifically linked to joint or disc pain, this is especially valuable.

Inversion therapy may reduce your need for back surgery. In a research study in the Disability and Rehabilitation medical journal, inversion therapy helped to minimize the need for surgery among people who had lumbar discogenic disease. However, more research needs to be done on this front.

How to Use an Inversion Table for Back Pain

Follow the instructions of your doctor and the specific inversion table you are using, as every model is different. However, regardless of the specific inversion table for back pain you are using, several best practices and tips may improve your results:

Take It Slow

Don’t immediately leap to full inversion, as many people find this disorienting. If you have never done inversion therapy before, you may wish to place the table at no greater of an angle than 30 to 45 degrees below horizontal.

Check Your Timing

When you are first starting out, aim to be inverted for no longer than a couple of minutes before returning to the horizontal plane.

Once you are experienced, you may increase the inversion time to one to five minutes, but you never want to be inverted longer than that.

However, you can cycle through your inversions. For example, you can do two-minute inversions followed by a couple of minutes of rest over the span of 20 minutes.

Use It Daily

For back health maintenance, you may want to stick with a once-a-day schedule. If you are experiencing back pain and other joint pain, you may find it beneficial to do inversion therapy two or three times a day.

Finally, it is important to make a few cautionary notes. First, the 2017 clinical guidelines of the American College of Physicians notes that most studies are inconclusive and far more research needs to be done on the benefits, or even drawbacks, of inversion therapy.

Second, inversion therapy (and any other treatments for back pain) should always be done under the medical supervision of your doctor. Back pain can be caused by a wide range of issues, including serious conditions, like osteoporosis or a slipped disk. Self-treating your back pain can aggravate the underlying causes if you do not know what they are, leading to even more severe back pain.

If you are worried about back pain and want to try inversion therapy, talk to your doctor first before hopping onto an inversion table.