

Medical Massage For Non-Surgical Treatment Of The Cervical Herniated Disc

One of the nonsurgical treatments for a cervical herniated disc is massage. I had a chance to speak with Andrea Wolkenberg who is a medical massage therapist and get her opinion on how massage can be used to treat the cervical herniated disc.

All of the modalities that we use in all of our treatments are geared towards increasing circulation. So, medical massage is one way of doing that, of manipulating the tissue and increasing the lymphatic flow in the area, bringing more blood to the area, taking waste products away and so we do that manually. So we are just manipulating the tissue with our hands to do that. There are lots of ways of doing that. That is one way, it is a great way, I do think it is one of the best ways.

Que 1: Are you treating the herniated disc or you are just treating the symptoms of the disc?

Ans 1: You are treating both. You are treating the symptoms of the disc because when you have pain, you go into spasm, when you have spasm you splint and that decreases circulation, which decreases oxygen, which does not allow waste products to get out of the area that is treated, so there is a chemical imbalance that occurs and that gives you more spasm, so it is a cycle.

Que 2: So you are breaking that?

Ans 2: So you have to do something to break into that cycle.

Que 3: So they call it medical massage?

Ans 3: Yes.

Que 4: Can people go to a massage therapist down the street for them and do that or should they do this from someone who is specifically called a medical massage therapist?

Ans 4: There are probably 20 different kinds of massage, and medical massage implies that the person who is performing that massage is licensed and one should always go to a licensed massage therapist. That is always a good idea because you know that they have their credentials and someone who knows how to work with injured people and you know, sort of _____ on the side of safety and knows what precautions to take, so you should have a licensed therapist.

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So to see what a licensed physical therapist would do with medical massage, I visited with the therapist _____ Ramraj to get an idea of her approach to a patient with a cervical herniated disc.

This patient has cervical fusion at C6-C7, and he has soft tissue tightness all the way from suboccipital level and all towards his low back. He has myofascial tightness, so what I am doing is, I am doing some soft tissue release to decrease the tightness in his neck, so, you know, once we finish, he will be able to do a little bit more range, he will be able to turn a little bit more, so there is less restriction and also less pain when he does his normal daily activities. So we are just trying to release his upper trapezius, I am here, I am going a little deeper at his scalenes and here are his suboccipitals, I am releasing that, so very gentle, really not too deep, I am not going towards his joints and release all towards his back. He also has back pain, so I am doing the combination of you know, from his neck to his back. If he has trigger points, I would actually work on the trigger points. He has a few of them in his upper trapezius area, but since he is very sensitive, I am not doing too deep of a release, so I am going really gentle for him. It is more of myofascial release and soft tissue release combination than specific trigger point release for this particular patient, but if he does have some, then I do some release.

Que 1: For a cervical herniated disc specifically, do you do this specific treatment or you are doing other types of treatment?

Ans 1: I do few other treatments, you know, if he has a herniated disc, depending on where the disc is, is it a posterior herniation or a posterolateral herniation or an anterior herniation, depending on that, I do specific intervertebral joint mobilization to reduce the disc if it is reducible. If it has a disc bulging or more so disc protrusion, then the mobilization really helps, but if it has gone to the point of disc extrusion, then _____ will really does not do much, but because of the herniation or because of the bulge, if the soft tissues are tight, on one side or both the sides, then the release really helps and along with that, the intervertebral mobilization also does help.

So, the bottom line in medical massage is, I love massage and the only thing better than massage therapy is free massage therapy, so try to get it covered within your physical therapy prescription and do it with the physical therapist as part of that program. If you like it and it is working out for you, then you can get more massage therapy on your own as long as you look out for a certified medical massage therapist as the person to treat you. Remember though, this is treating the muscle spasm and neck pain. It is not treating the herniated disc itself. So if you are not getting better, you are going to have to move onto another therapy.

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