

Physical Therapy For Non-Surgical Treatment Of The Cervical Herniated Disc Introduction

Physical therapy is one of the most traditional treatments for a cervical herniated disc. To get a better understanding of what a physical therapist does, I met with Ron Sweitzer who is an extraordinarily experienced therapist in New York.

Que 1: To just get a typical patient, they have some pain in the neck, but they really have pain down the arms, some numbness or tingling. Well how would you sort of attack that patient? How would you approach them?

Ans 1: One of the aspects of course is the manual therapy.

Que 2: What does that mean exactly?

Ans 2: It really just means using your hands. There is a variety of different techniques that we do, for example, most of these people will have muscle spasm, so with our hands, we can feel the muscle spasm, which means we are going to use our hands to treat it, which may be a deep trigger point massage technique. There may be some other tissue manipulation, a massage type of approach that we use to it. We will also use manual distraction where we will cradle their neck and gently pull, which is very often relieving and that is a treatment technique, but that also may then direct us to mechanical traction, which we can talk about. And then, we will also want to mobilize the neck. It is when the person has been in muscle spasm for so long, their neck is tight. They do not have the normal mobility. So, by putting our hands on, we can produce different types of motions called, we do not call manipulation, we call it mobilization; it is a gentler approach that we can produce motions the patient cannot produce themselves, and this helps to gain mobility back and stimulate more blood supply to the discs and to the joint and you know to promote healing.

Que 3: Does that hurt? When they are here, should they expect to be in pain?

Ans 3: No, the only thing that should or might hurt is some of the deep tissue work and the trigger point technique. When you hit at trigger point, it is hypersensitive and there will be some pain, but very often the person says, "ah, but it is that good pain." They want that tissue to be touched and manipulated because they feel "yeah, I need something."

Que 4: So, what is a typical session, is it 45 minutes or half an hour? How long?

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Ans 4: Yeah, it ends up usually being close to an hour. By the time we use some heat to get them to relax a little bit, there will be some manual therapy. Again if they are at an exercise phase, we go gently with exercise at first; there will be the exercise part of it, and then we may use another modality like electrical stimulation or there are a few other things that we can talk about.

Que 5: So do you start off with the manual and then go to mobility exercise?

Ans 5: I personally do, because I want them to get used to the feel of my hands and I want to get a feel of their tissue, so I can reassess when they come back, is this tighter or looser than it was before.

So, the bottom line of physical therapy is, it is a great treatment and a great place to start when you have a cervical herniated disc. It encompasses exercises, education, and strengthening, so I completely endorse it and think that if you have a cervical herniated disc, it is a good place to start.

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