

Stretching For Non-Surgical Treatment Of The Cervical Herniated Disc

A lot of patients with a cervical herniated disc ask me "what is the best stretching exercises to do?" I am not sure that stretching actually helps. Sometimes, I have actually seen it hurt patients. So I went to speak to Andrea Wolkenberg who is a physical therapist and does quite a bit of stretching about her impression of how stretching can be used as treatment for a cervical herniated disc.

What we are trying to do always is we are trying to get the patient into normal alignment, to unload the vertebral segments, to unload the discs. So if you have muscle imbalance where you have your short type muscles, let us say, the front and overstretched muscles in the back or vice versa depending on what your particular posture is. You need to stretch the short tight muscles and you need to strengthen the overstretched weak muscles.

Que 1: So is the answer to the question, yes, stretching is good for or can be used for cervical herniated disc.

Ans 1: It can be used for cervical herniated disc, but it has to be used appropriately. You have to target the tissue and you have to make sure that in the course of stretching whatever muscle you are not increasing the pain and we are always looking to centralize the pain. So if anything we do, the person says, "uh, you know _____ arm" that is the sign that you do not want to be doing that particular movement. We always, when we do our treatment, we want to have that pain recede back towards the center. That is how we do it.

So the bottom line with stretching is that I think you have to be very careful. A herniated disc is putting pressure on the nerve and that is creating symptoms down the arm and a lot of stretching and pulling could actually aggravate this. So you can try stretching, but be aware that if your symptoms are getting worse, you have to stop. I think that stretching to mobilize your neck and get yourself moving a little bit more is fine, but should you have any increased pains, numbness, tingling, or weakness, it is not for you and you should stop. Stretching is okay. I would not put it at the top of the list. I would be very cautious in using stretching as a treatment for cervical herniated disc.

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