

# Mechanical / manual cervical traction patient guide

This leaflet outlines what to expect during cervical (neck) traction treatment.

## What is cervical traction?

Cervical traction is the application of an intermittent or sustained stretch to the neck. This can either be done manually by your physiotherapist, or mechanically using a pulley and weights, or by utilising a mechanical traction bed.

## What will it involve?

If the traction is manual, the physiotherapist will place one hand firmly at the back of your head and the other under your chin. They will then apply a pulling force slowly and gently. This is performed with you in a lying position. You will be well supported and comfortable throughout. Remember that this is aimed at reducing your symptoms. If you are not comfortable you should let your physiotherapist know immediately.

If the traction is mechanical, a neck harness will be placed at the back of your head and under your chin. This will then be attached to a pulley and weights, or to a mechanical traction bed. This can be done in sitting or in lying. This stretch should be comfortable. If it is not you should inform your physiotherapist immediately. You will be given a safety release button to switch off the traction.

After treatment you will be advised to rest for a few minutes.

## What are the benefits?

Traction can be used for various neck problems. Benefits of traction can be pain relief, stretching of soft tissue structures e.g. muscles, reduction of muscle spasm and increased movement.

## What are the risks?

Traction may temporarily increase your symptoms. If you feel dizzy or faint during or just after your treatment you should inform your physiotherapist immediately.

There are some instances where traction requires caution or should not be used.

This treatment may **not** be suitable for you if:

- You have rheumatoid arthritis (RA).
- You have ankylosing spondylitis (AS).
- You have psoriatic arthritis.
- You have osteoporosis.
- You are or have been on long term steroid use.
- You have sustained trauma, with possible fractures, to the area to be treated.
- You have had previous neck surgery.
- You are pregnant.

- You have a cancer or suspected cancer over the area to be treated.
- You have had radiotherapy or other ionizing radiations (in the last 6 months) in the area to be treated.
- You have epilepsy.
- You have suffered from a stroke or mini stroke (TIA).
- You have any problems with your jaw.
- You suffer with drop attacks, fainting or dizziness.
- You are taking anticoagulants or have any bleeding disorders.

The treatment for your condition may require more than one visit. If you have any other questions about your treatment please ask your physiotherapist.

### Useful numbers and contacts

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust  
**Orthopaedic Physiotherapy Department**  
Royal Berkshire Hospital  
London Road, Reading RG1 5AN  
Tel: 0118 322 7812 / 7811

Visit the Trust website at [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Debbie Burden, RBFT Physiotherapy Department  
Reviewed: August 2022  
Review due: August 2024