Efficacy of home cervical traction therapy.

Swezey RL, Swezey AM, Warner K.

Swezey Institute, Arthritis and Back Pain Center, Santa Monica, California 90403, USA.

Abstract
Cervical traction is administered by various techniques ranging from supine mechanical motorized cervical traction to seated cervical traction using an over-the-door pulley support with attached weights. Duration of cervical traction can range from a few minutes to 20 to 30 min, once or twice weekly to several times per day. Anecdotal evidence suggests efficacy and safety, but there is no documentation of efficacy of cervical traction beyond short-term pain reduction. Because of a clinical impression that a simplified, inexpensive, over-the-door home cervical traction method of treatment requiring 5 min of cervical traction twice daily was efficacious for both cervical pain and radiculopathic syndromes, we undertook a retrospective study of 58 outpatients treated between 1994 and 1996. Age range was 29 to 84 (mean, 56) yr. Twenty-three males and 35 females were classified as Grade 1 to Grade 3 according to the Quebec Task Force of Whiplash-Associated Disorders Cohort Study. Outcomes were as follows: Grade 1 (mild)--4 of 4 (100%) patients improved; Grade 2 (moderate)--34 of 44 (77%) patients improved (P < 0.01), 5 were unchanged, and 5 felt their symptoms were aggravated by cervical traction; Grade 3 (patients with radiculopathy)--9 of 10 (90%) patients improved (P < 0.01). In a retrospective study, a brief (3-5 min), over-the-door home cervical traction modality provided symptomatic relief in 81% of the patients with mild to moderately severe (Grade 3) cervical spondylosis syndromes. Prospective, randomized assessment of cervical traction for this and other methods is needed.