

Medical Coverage Policy | Vertebral Axial Decompression



EFFECTIVE DATE: 07|01|2007
POLICY LAST UPDATED: 06|01|2022

OVERVIEW

Vertebral axial decompression applies traction to the vertebral column to reduce intradiscal pressure, and in doing so, potentially relieves low back pain associated with herniated lumbar discs or degenerative lumbar disc disease.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not applicable

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Not applicable

POLICY STATEMENT

Medicare Advantage Plans

Vertebral axial decompression is considered not covered as the evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

Commercial Products

Vertebral axial decompression is considered not medically necessary as the evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups and contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Benefit Booklet, Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable not medically necessary/not covered benefits/coverage.

BACKGROUND

Vertebral axial decompression (also referred to as mechanized spinal distraction therapy) is used as traction therapy to treat chronic low back pain.

In general, during treatment, the patient wears a pelvic harness and lies prone on a specially equipped table. The table is slowly extended, and a distraction force is applied via the pelvic harness until the desired tension is reached, followed by a gradual decrease of the tension. The cyclic nature of the treatment allows the patient to withstand stronger distraction forces compared with static lumbar traction techniques. An individual session typically includes 15 cycles of tension, and 10 to 15 daily treatments may be administered.

Several devices used for vertebral axial decompression have been cleared for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through the 510(k) process. Examples of these devices include the VAX-D®, Decompression Reduction Stabilization (DRS®) System, Accu-SPINA® System, DRX-3000®, DRX9000®, SpineMED Decompression Table®, Antalgic-Trak®, Lordex® Traction Unit, and Triton® DTS. According to labeled indications from the FDA, vertebral axial decompression may be used as a treatment modality for patients with incapacitating low back pain and for decompression of the intervertebral discs and facet joints. FDA product code: ITH.

For individuals with chronic lumbar pain who receive vertebral axial decompression, the evidence includes a systematic review and RCTs. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, functional outcomes, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. Evidence for the efficacy of vertebral axial decompression on health outcomes is limited. Because a placebo effect may be expected with any treatment that has pain relief as the principal outcome, RCTs with sham controls and validated outcome measures are required. The only sham-controlled randomized trial published to date did not show a benefit of vertebral axial decompression compared with the control group. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

CODING

The following HCPCS code(s) is not covered for Medicare Advantage Plans and not medically necessary for Commercial Products:

S9090 Vertebral axial decompression, per session

It is incorrect coding to file vertebral axial decompression using any other health service code such as chiropractic manipulation, nerve decompression surgery, or physical therapy manipulation.

RELATED POLICIES

Not applicable

PUBLISHED

Provider Update, August 2022

Provider Update, August 2021

Provider Update, August 2020

Provider Update, August 2019

Provider Update, February 2019

REFERENCES

1. Pelozo J. Non-Surgical Treatments for Lower Back Pain. Spine-health. <https://www.spine-health.com/conditions/lower-back-pain/nonsurgical-treatments-lower-back-pain>. Updated April 20, 2017. Accessed February 23, 2022.
2. Vanti C, Turone L, Panizzolo A, et al. Vertical traction for lumbar radiculopathy: a systematic review. Arch Physiother. Mar 15 2021; 11(1): 7. PMID 33715638
3. Schimmel JJ, de Kleuver M, Horsting PP, et al. No effect of traction in patients with low back pain: a single centre, single blind, randomized controlled trial of Intervertebral Differential Dynamics Therapy. Eur Spine J. Dec 2009; 18(12): 1843-50. PMID 19484433
4. Isner-Horobeti ME, Dufour SP, Schaeffer M, et al. High-Force Versus Low-Force Lumbar Traction in Acute Lumbar Sciatica Due to Disc Herniation: A Preliminary Randomized Trial. J Manipulative Physiol Ther. Nov 2016; 39(9): 645-654. PMID 27838140
5. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. National Coverage Decision (NCD) for Vertebral Axial Decompression (VAX-D) (160.16). 1997; <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/ncd-details.aspx?ncdid=124&Keyword=vertebral%20axial%20decompress&KeywordLookUp=Title&KeywordSearchType=Exact&bc=CAAAAAAAAAAAAA>. Accessed February 23, 2022.

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