

# Inversion Tables

## Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions

By Dr. Brandon Crouch



The effects of gravity on your back and body can be devastating. One way to combat this is through inversion. In this article I will go over some frequently asked questions and give a little more insight as to how and when to use an inversion table.

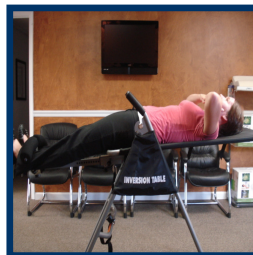
**What is an Inversion Table?** An inversion table is a flat rotating table allowing you to hang upside down. While hanging upside down it creates a gravity assisted traction on your back and body.



**Who could benefit from an inversion table?** People with chronic pain and stiffness in the mid to lower back often benefit the most from using an inversion table. I would not recommend it for anyone in an acute inflammatory stage with intense or radiating pain or anyone with neck pain.

In cases of specific lower back conditions such as previous surgeries, congenital fusions (since birth), bulging or herniated discs, moderate to severe arthritis, etc. it is best to consult with your health care professional before using the inversion table. Even with some of the above conditions the inversion table can still be used and be very beneficial.

**How do you use an inversion table?** An inversion table is used by strapping your ankles in and laying flat against the table. If the inversion table is set up properly for your weight and height then raising your arms will be enough to shift your body weight and invert the table and moving your arms back down by your side should bring the table back to an upright position. If this doesn't happen easily then you will need to modify the height of the table until you rotate easily. (I think it is easiest to keep your hands on your stomach, then chest, then forehead so that you don't invert too quickly.)



I recommend beginners start with a slow progressive type of inversion with only an approximate 100° - 120° inversion (10° -30° beyond horizontal) for the first few weeks. Most tables have a strap that you can use to limit how far you invert. By using this it will prevent you from going too far.

While inverted gently lift your shoulders (one at a time) an inch or so off the table gently rocking back and forth. This will help you slowly stretch down the table. (WARNING: The more you stretch the more the table will want to invert. It can move very quickly if you are not prepared.)

The best way to use the inversion table is through intermittent traction. To do this slowly invert for up to 30 seconds and then return back to the upright position. Repeat this process inverting further each time until you get to your desired inverted angle. This should be done in a slow manner. I recommend only inverting for a total of 5 – 7 minutes each session. One reason is that this is plenty of time to fully stretch and traction out the back. The second reason is that if you invert for too long you may strain and injure the same structures you are trying to help. You can repeat this once or multiple times per day.

At approximately 150° inversion (60° beyond horizontal) you will be inverted to the point you are parallel with the back legs of the table. For most people this angle will allow you to get all the benefits of inversion without fully inverting to 180° (90° beyond horizontal).

**What to expect?** As you invert you will feel pressure in your head as the blood flow increases. This is a normal feeling. This is why you want to slowly invert so that your body gets used to this feeling. You will also feel some pressure at your ankles where they are strapped.

**Is inversion the same as spinal decompression?** No. Although using the inversion table gives you gravity assisted traction it is much different than spinal decompression. I will be discussing spinal decompression and mechanical traction in a later article.

**What are the weight restrictions and costs?** Most inversion tables vary in durability and maximum weight capacity. Most tables will hold up to 250 – 300 pounds. The cost range averages from around \$150 up to around \$1500. (I have found the less expensive inversion tables to be great. My personal inversion table was only \$150 and is very easy and comfortable to use.) The biggest factor is the weight capacity. You always want to follow the manufacturer's guidelines and safety restrictions.

**Tips:**

1. If you experience discomfort then you may be inverting too much, too quickly, or for too long. While inverting you are stretching muscles and ligaments that can be strained if pushed too hard.
2. Remember bigger inversion angles for longer periods of time does not mean you will always gain more benefits.

Inversion tables are a fantastic way to stretch and combat the effects of gravity on the back. It can help stretch tight muscles and ligaments and relieve pressure off of stressed spinal discs and vertebrae. For a minimal investment they can be a wonderful adjunct to help keep your back in great shape!

Disclaimers: Always consult your healthcare professional before starting any new exercise or stretching routine. If you have any serious health conditions, especially related to the heart or blood pressure, then you should consult your doctor before inverting. Be sure to follow all manufacturers' recommendations. The information contained in this article should never replace the recommendations as made by your healthcare provider or by the manufacturer and is just for informational purposes only.

Special thanks to Jordan Jones for assisting in the above inversion table images.

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