

Clinical Practice Guideline: Webster Technique

Date of Implementation: July 13, 2006

Product: Specialty

GUIDELINES

American Specialty Health – Specialty (ASH) has determined that Webster technique is unproven because credible scientific evidence is inadequate to support the claimed applications of this procedure.

Patients must be informed verbally and in writing the nature of any procedure or treatment technique that is considered experimental/investigational or unproven, poses a significant health and safety risk, and/or is scientifically implausible. If the patient decides to receive such services, they must sign a Member Billing Acknowledgment Form (for Medicare use Advance Beneficiary Notice of Non-Coverage form) indicating they understand they are assuming financial responsibility for any service-related fees. Further, the patient must sign an attestation indicating that they understand what is known and unknown about, and the possible risks associated with such techniques prior to receiving these services. All procedures, including those considered here, must be documented in the medical record. Finally, prior to using experimental/investigational or unproven procedures, those that pose a significant health and safety risk, and/or those considered scientifically implausible, it is incumbent on the practitioner to confirm that their professional liability insurance covers the use of these techniques or procedures in the event of an adverse outcome.

DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND

Webster technique is a form of chiropractic analysis and adjustment that claims to relieve the musculoskeletal causes of intrauterine constraint that can obstruct normal fetal movement. First, the sacrum and associated joints are evaluated with specific low force chiropractic adjustments to the sacrum with the intent of relieving tension exerted on the uterus due to sacral rotation. Then light effleurage trigger point therapy is applied to correct pelvic muscle and ligament imbalances and release any painful muscle nodules palpated in the lower abdomen. The Webster technique is believed to facilitate fetal motility within the uterus and enable repositioning (e.g., of a breech presentation) into the optimal position for birth. According to its proponents, this non-invasive technique does not involve manipulating the abdomen in an attempt to change the position of the baby.

Larry Webster, DC developed this technique in 1978 to restore pelvic balance and function for pregnant patients. Dr. Webster also founded the International Chiropractic Pediatric Association (ICPA), which continues teaching this technique as part of its post graduate programs in Chiropractic Pediatrics.

Using the Webster technique to reposition a diagnosed breech presentation during late stages of pregnancy *in lieu of* care from an obstetrician may delay appropriate treatment for a medical condition (substitution effects). However, the organization teaching this technique clarifies that chiropractors are not practicing obstetrics.

EVIDENCE REVIEW

A review of the literature found one retrospective study in which 1,047 ICPA members were mailed a survey regarding their use of the Webster technique in managing pregnant patients with breech presentations. Among the 112 responding doctors who met inclusion criteria for the survey (11% response), 102 (91%) reported the patient's breech presentation resolved while 10 (9%) did not resolve with the technique. The small response rate is subject to reporting bias and breech presentations were not confirmed by diagnostic ultrasound in 59 of the reported cases.

There are several case studies reporting therapeutic successes or lack thereof with babies in a breech position turning to a normal position; however, the majority are not published in peer-reviewed journals.

Chiropractic manipulation and therapeutic massage have demonstrated efficacy with a variety of musculoskeletal conditions. The increased weight bearing load and altered biomechanics associated with pregnancy can contribute to musculoskeletal related symptoms. However, more research is needed to validate the ability of Webster technique to correct a breech presentation.

References

- ICPA Website. About the Webster Technique. Retrieved May 27, 2025 from <https://icpa4kids.com/training/webster-certification/webster-technique/>
- Pistolese RA. The Webster Technique: a chiropractic technique with obstetric implications. J Manipulative Physiol Ther. 2002;25(6):E1-E9. doi:10.1067/mmt.2002.126127
- Roecker CB. Breech repositioning unresponsive to Webster technique: coexistence of oligohydramnios. J Chiropr Med. 2013;12(2):74-78. doi:10.1016/j.jcm.2013.06.003