

Viscosupplementation for Knee Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a joint disease affecting millions of Americans. It is a degenerative condition involving cartilage and synovial fluid. Cartilage is a connective tissue that covers the ends of bones within a joint. Synovial fluid is a gel-type substance which provides lubrication in the joint space. The breakdown of these substances leads to the hallmark symptoms of osteoarthritis including pain, stiffness, swelling, and decreased range of motion. Typically osteoarthritis affects weight-bearing joints and the knees are very commonly involved. When afflicted with this condition in the knees, people may have difficulty walking, going up and down stairs, squatting, and kneeling.

Initial treatment for osteoarthritis involves physical therapy, weight loss, exercise, heat/ice, and anti-inflammatory medication. Water therapy may also be recommended as it can have excellent results for those with joint pain. However, some patients may continue to have moderate to severe pain despite these interventions. For these individuals, viscosupplementation may be the answer.

Viscosupplementation is the injection of a thick substance (Synvisc) into a joint affected with osteoarthritis. It is FDA approved for the treatment of knee osteoarthritis. The treatment is designed to provide additional lubrication for the knee which is lost with the breakdown of synovial fluid. Additional goals are to reduce overall pain and increase mobility.

If you have tried multiple medications or are not a candidate for surgery, viscosupplementation may be right for you. The treatment can be done for one or both knees. First, for patient comfort, a local anesthetic is injected. Then any excess fluid will be drained from the joint space. After this, the Synvisc solution will be injected. The treatment is repeated for three consecutive weeks.

Risks of any injection involve pain, swelling, itching, and bruising. The procedure is not done for those with a known allergy to Synvisc solution, eggs, birds, or feathers. It is also not recommended for those with an infection or rash at in the injection site.

Results from these injections vary for each patient. The typical response is pain relief of up to 6 months with the greatest results in the first 10-12 weeks. If effective, the treatment can be repeated in six months. While it does not slow the progression of the condition, it can provide a significant degree of pain relief.

If this seems like a treatment that may benefit you, consult with your physician to discuss it further. After an examination and evaluation of knee x-rays, your physician may recommend Synvisc as an optimal treatment for you. Increased mobility and decreased pain may be right around the corner.



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