

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Viscosupplementation treatment for osteoarthritis of the knee

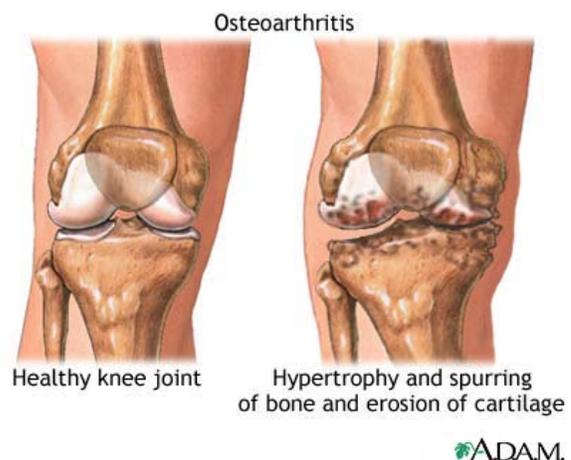
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Plain Language Summary:

Who should consider Viscosupplementation?

Viscosupplementation is a treatment for osteoarthritis, a disease that affects the joints. Osteoarthritis causes cartilage, the cushioning layer between your bones to wear away. As a result, bones rub together, causing pain, swelling and stiffness of the joint. Osteoarthritis is more common in older age and in people who are overweight. It can also occur years after a serious injury to a joint.

To diagnose osteoarthritis, your doctor will examine your knee for swelling and tenderness. He or she will also observe your ability to move the joint and to walk. An x-ray can be helpful in the diagnosis of osteoarthritis. The x-ray might show narrowing of the joint space due to loss of cartilage or bone damage. Your doctor might also order some blood tests to rule out other forms of arthritis.



When osteoarthritis is first diagnosed, your doctor might recommend the following treatments initially:

- Rest and/or modified activity to avoid activities that make your pain worse
- Ice the joint several times daily
- Take over the counter medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help reduce pain and swelling in the joint
- Start an exercise or physical therapy program to increase range of motion and strengthen the muscles around the joint
- Corticosteroid injection into the joint to provide short term relief of pain and inflammation

You might find some of these treatments to be more effective than others. You should talk to your doctor to come up with the treatment plan that works best for you. If your pain, stiffness, or swelling are not better with the above treatments, viscosupplementation may be an option for you to consider with your doctor.

What is viscosupplementation?

Viscosupplementation involves injecting hyaluronic acid into the knee. Hyaluronic acid is a substance that is found naturally in the fluid of the knee joint. It provides lubrication and supports the health of the cartilage, or the cushioning of the joint. In osteoarthritis, hyaluronic acid levels in the joint are low. Studies have shown that injecting hyaluronic acid into the joint reduces pain and improves function in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee. There are many different formulations of hyaluronic acid that are used as viscosupplements. Depending on the product used, you will receive 3-5 shots over several weeks. These injections do not immediately relieve pain. It may take about a month before any improvement is seen. Viscosupplementation provides temporary pain relief and is not a cure for osteoarthritis.

You should talk to your doctor about which viscosupplement product might be best. Viscosupplementation appears to be safe. Some of the minor side effects that you might experience include brief irritation and swelling of the knee. Additional studies are needed to look further into the long-term safety of these products.

Additional Resources:

For more information:

Medline Plus:

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/osteoarthritis.html

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases:

http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Osteoarthritis/default.asp

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons:

<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00217>

Key Words:

Osteoarthritis of the knee

Degenerative joint disease of the knee

Viscosupplementation

Hyaluronic acid

Knee joint injection

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