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FACTSHEET

Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) Injections for Joint Pain

Joint injections are the most common procedure used for joint pain. Hyaluronic acid (HA) injections are particularly effective for osteoarthritis and other degenerative joint conditions. This factsheet explains how and why you may consider a HA injection procedure, as well as the potential risks and recovery requirements.

A healthy joint has cartilage and lubricating joint fluid — called synovial fluid — to protect and cushion the bones, allowing them to move without friction. In arthritic conditions such as osteoarthritis or inflammatory arthritis, the cartilage protecting the joint becomes compromised and the joint fluid loses its shock-absorbing qualities. This increases friction within your joints, leading to pain, stiffness and poor mobility.

The cause of arthritis is often multifactorial. Therefore, your treatment must be multifactorial too. A minimally invasive procedure may be used as part of a multidisciplinary treatment plan to provide medium to long term pain relief.

It's important to note that joint pain procedures will not cure joint pain. Rather, they provide an extended period of pain relief during which you can progress with physiotherapy and implement the lifestyle changes necessary to achieve long term improvements.

TYPES OF ARTHRITIS

OSTEOARTHRITIS (OA)

Osteoarthritis – sometimes referred to as degenerative joint disease – is the most common form of arthritis. It involves the gradual degradation of the connective tissues that support your joints. Symptoms include joint pain and stiffness (generally aggravated by too much or too little movement). OA generally develops slowly over time and is most common in the later stages of life.

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A common misconception about OA is that it will inevitably worsen over time. This is not necessarily the case. With medical and lifestyle interventions, OA progression can be stopped and, in some cases, reversed.

INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS

Inflammatory arthritis is a term used to describe a group of arthritic conditions that are usually autoimmune in nature. The immune system attacks your connective tissues, leading to inflammation within your joints. The most common forms include rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, lupus and ankylosing spondylitis.

Treating inflammatory arthritis requires addressing the immune system dysregulation while also supporting joint health. Inflammatory arthritis is not currently considered 'curable'. However, complete remission is achievable through medical and lifestyle interventions.

PLATELET RICH PLASMA (PRP) INJECTIONS

Joint injections are the most common procedure used for joint pain. They allow medications to be inserted directly into the affected joint(s) to produce a targeted effect. Different medicines will be injected depending on your condition, symptoms, and requirements.

PLATELET RICH PLASMA INJECTIONS

Platelet rich plasma (PRP) therapy is a relatively new medical procedure used to heal or regenerate damaged soft tissues. Platelet rich plasma contains growth factors that help heal muscles, tendons or ligaments when injected into an area of injury.

Common injuries or conditions treated using PRP injections include tendonitis, rotator cuff injuries, osteoarthritis, spine conditions, arthritic conditions, and repetitive strain injuries.

STEP BY STEP

This procedure is a two-step process. First, a needle is used to draw your blood. The blood is then placed in a centrifuge, which separates the platelets from the other components of the blood. This gives us a concentrated source of your own blood plasma and platelets.

Next, medical imaging is used to place a needle into the affected joint, muscle or connective tissue. A local anaesthetic is injected to numb the area, followed by an injection of your own platelet rich plasma. The procedure takes one to two hours, including preparation time.

RECOVERY

You may experience moderate discomfort for a few days after the procedure.

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Do not take anti-inflammatory medications (including NSAIDs, steroids and aspirin) for at least three days before and two weeks after the procedure, as they will prevent the platelets from working.

You can use a cold compress or paracetamol or stronger pain relief if necessary.

You may resume normal activities after the procedure. However, you should avoid heavy lifting, vigorous exercising, strong vibrations, or jolting movements for several days.

SIDE EFFECTS

Complications from PRP therapy are rare but may include infection of the treatment site or nerve damage. Formation of scar tissue and calcification are also rare but possible. There is also a low risk of allergic reactions.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The PRP blood tubes cost \$150 each. There is also an additional \$150 fee for the use of the centrifuge and ultrasound machine. If the PRP procedure is performed at a Painless Clinic, private health funds may not reimburse you. However, if the PRP procedure is performed in a hospital, part of the procedure may be covered.

Please ask for a quote before proceeding.

There will be a co-payment before the procedure which covers the cost of the blood tubes and centrifuge. Other procedural costs are charged at HBF/Medibank Private rates and are therefore 100% covered. If you are with a different health fund, you may wish to contact them before your procedure to discuss details relating to any gap or consider switching to a fully funded insurer.

Please note your anaesthetics and radiographer are billed privately so there may be a gap.