

PROLOTHERAPY

What is prolotherapy?

Prolotherapy is an injection technique that has been shown to cause growth in cells and tissue to stabilize and strengthen weakened joints, cartilage, ligaments and tendons. The dextrose injections also has a pain relieving effect by slowing nerve conduction in pain nerve fibers.

What does prolotherapy address?

The spine is composed of bones, tendons, ligaments, discs, cartilage and connective tissue. Discs and cartilage serve as shock absorbers and keep your bones from rubbing against one another. In acute injuries, ligaments and tendons may sprain or partially tear causing instability the joints; grinding and tissue damage can occur. This causes the discs and cartilage to degenerate which ultimately adds to joint instability, pain and malfunction.

Ligaments act as primary stabilizers of the joints in the body. They are the nuts and bolts that keep bones together and function to limit excess range of motion. Tendons connect muscles to bones in order to provide motion.

The injections will be performed on a 2 - 6 weekly basis. The total number of sessions will typically range from 4 - 7. Each treatment session results in increased deposition of collagen and fibrinous tissue, the building blocks for ligaments and tendons, into the injected areas.

As a result, the joints become stronger and more stable. At the same time, the small pain nerves that supply the ligament tissue becomes less sensitive and send fewer pain signals to the spinal cord/brain. Research has shown that prolotherapy is capable of increasing the size of ligament tissue by 30-40%. The frequency and number of injections depend on the area, the individual and the type of dysfunction and damage.

You may experience 3 - 4 days of increased pain due to local inflammation after which your pain should improve. In my experience 50-60% of patients experience less pain after the first treatment while it may take 2 - 3 sessions before the rest notice a difference. Avoid anti-inflammatories after each treatment. Tylenol, Tylenol#3, Tramacet and opioids are permitted to control your pain in the first week.

Indications for prolotherapy

Prolotherapy is indicated for pain derived from tender tendons and ligaments due to injury or degenerative changes. We use it on many patients after whiplash injuries involving the neck, upper and lower back. It is also indicated for tender bursa's, tender ligaments around joints and arthritic joint pain in general.

A recent randomized controlled study by a Korean group showed that intra-articular prolotherapy into the Sacro-iliac joints(SI-joints) of patients with confirmed SI-joint pain, was superior to Cortisone after 6, 12 and 15 months. They showed that 58-62% of the prolotherapy group received > 50% relief on these follow-up dates compared to only 10-27% of the cortisone group.

Studies in whiplash patients showed good results after intra-articular facet joint injections in the neck with prolotherapy. This was despite most patients still being involved in litigation.

Cost of prolotherapy

Prolotherapy is not covered by the Medical Services Plan of BC. Some private insurance companies may cover the entire cost of the treatment, while others cover part and some none. The cost of treatment is dependent on the number of sites treated, the use of specialized equipment like ultrasound or fluoroscopy (for joints or deeper structures). All our prolotherapy procedures are done under ultrasound guidance to ensure accuracy and safe needle placement.

The cost will range from \$100/session for peripheral joints and \$200/session for spinal injections.