Hyaluronic Acid Injections

Hyaluronic acid (HA) (Durolane, Monovisc, Synvisc), also known as viscosupplementation injections, are used to treat the pain and stiffness, and improve the function of joints that have osteoarthritis. Hyaluronic acid is a naturally occurring molecule that is normally present in healthy joints. In arthritic joints the amount and quality of hyaluronic acid are lower. Studies have shown that injecting HA also stimulates your joint to make more of this important molecule. These injections can successfully improve symptoms in up to 80% of patients, but they do not work for everyone. The maximum effect is noticed up to 6-8 weeks after the injection, but improvement may occur in as little as 2 weeks. The benefit is temporary, typically lasting from 6-12 months. Hyaluronic acid injections work best in mild to moderate arthritis. They can be repeated as often as every 3 months in patient’s who benefit.

The injection procedure is covered by Alberta Health Care, but the cost of the hyaluronic acid product is not. A receipt and prescription will be provided to you in the event that this cost is covered by your private health insurance plan. In very specific situations the companies may provide samples for free on compassionate grounds.

In our clinic we perform knee, shoulder and ankle injections; hip and some smaller joint injections must be performed under x-ray or ultrasound guidance at a Radiology (x-ray) clinic.

RISKS OF HA INJECTION

Viscosupplementation will be offered to you when the benefits are thought to outweigh the MINIMAL risks.

Pain, Swelling and/or Stiffness: Transient pain, swelling and/or stiffness, as well as warmth or redness localized to the joint may occur within 24 hours of the injection and can last for up to 10 days.

Post-injection Inflammatory Reaction: This is an uncommon reaction that occurs in the first day or 2 after the joint is injected with hyaluronic acid. This reaction is characterized by increased swelling and pain in the injected joint. There is usually no redness of the overlying skin, although the joint may feel warm. Icing the area for up to 20 minutes at a time using an ice pack covered with towel can be helpful; do not apply ice directly to your skin. Tylenol (acetaminophen) or an anti-inflammatory such as Advil® (Ibuprofen) or Aleve® (Naproxen) can be used to help control the pain. If the pain and swelling last longer than 10 days notify your doctor. This occurs more often after a difficult injection.

Infection: The risk of infection is extremely low. Studies suggest that the risk of infection after joint injection is about 1/10,000. Signs of infection usually occur around 4 days but can occur up to 10 days after the injection. They include fever and/or chills, as well as pain, warmth and redness of the joint injected. If you develop these symptoms please call our office or go to the nearest urgent care or emergency clinic and tell them that you recently had a viscosupplementation injection.

Allergic Reaction: Synvisc is derived from rooster comb, so if you are allergic to poultry products (chicken, eggs, feathers) please inform your doctor. If this is the case you will be offered either Monovisc or Durolane. Unfortunately, 2% of the time you can experience a joint reaction (see above) to any of the products. These are not allergic reactions; they are believed to be due to the volume of product injected and the difficulty of the injection. If you have had a reaction to viscosupplementation in the past, please notify your doctor prior to your injection.

Other Adverse Effects: Other potential short and long term adverse effects include but are not limited to: headache, dizziness, rashes, bleeding, nerve or blood vessel injury. If you have any questions, please ask your doctor. If you have persistent swelling or pain, fever or chills, or if you notice a significant change in your well-being, please contact the clinic office at 403-251-9535.