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Patient information Leaflet

Prolotherapy

Ligaments help to provide stability in the joints. They prevent the joint from moving more than the normal range. Some people have lax ligaments that allow more than normal movement- often spoken of as "double jointed.

Some ligaments can be overstretched, or even torn. The ligament may then not control and support the joint adequately- thus leading to "instability" which may put abnormal stresses on the joints and discs in the spine or other joints in the body. Pregnancy can cause the pelvic joint ligaments to soften. These ligaments sometimes fail to tighten up after childbirth and therefore allow too much movement- hence "sacroiliac instability".Repetitive injury to ligaments, as in recurrent ankle, knee or shoulder sprains, can cause the ligaments to lose their joint supporting characteristics. The joint becomes unstable, and the neighbouring muscle groups are unable on their own to support the joint.

Prolotherapy (ligament strengthening injections), also known as Sclerosant injections, works by stimulating the body to make new fibres which are laid down within the substance of the ligaments, thickening and strengthening them. The solution: phenol 2%, dextrose 30%, and glycerol 30% is mixed with local anaesthetic and injected in small amounts into each end of the ligament, close to the attachment to the bone. This initially provokes inflammation, attracting the cells that make collagen fibre to the area. Over the ensuing weeks, the fibre is incorporated into the existing ligament.

Each ligament has to be stimulated 3 times at intervals of 7-10 days, in order to produce sound fibrous development. Hence the injections are given as a course of treatment.

Because Prolotherapy for ligaments is not widely practiced, it has not as yet been licensed for this particular type of treatment. The organic compounds in the solution are rapidly disposed of by the body, hence allowing a repeat course of treatment- should it be necessary.

Prolotherapy does not create scar tissue but healthy collagen fibres in the lax ligaments.

What to expect after a treatment session

These injections do cause some aching and stiffness for 2-3 days. Rest is not necessary; normal activities should be continued. Paracetamol, rather the Aspirin or Nurofen, can be taken for pain relief.

Complications are very rare since the injection is not placed into the spinal canal or near spinal nerves. Infection occurs in 1 in 17,000 cases, this being the main complication.

The benefit is not immediate, but gradual. It becomes noticeable after 6-8 weeks, increasing up to 12 weeks.

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