

Prolotherapy could be the solution to your chronic pain. (Natural Solutions for the Woman Over 50).

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If you have chronic **pain**, chances are you've tried many therapies including anti-inflammatory drugs, nutrients, and self-help techniques like massage, exercise, and stretching. Sometimes it seems like there's no answer.

The reason, I think, is because **pain** is often treated with a Band-Aid approach. What I mean by this is so many therapies address blocking **pain** receptors or increasing circulation but don't address the bottom-line cause. By now, you know I'm a detective, always looking for the underlying reason behind any problem. And the reason for chronic **pain** is often unstable ligaments that lead to inflammation.

Muscles and ligaments are different structures. Muscles are large, strong tissues with a good blood supply, while ligaments are smaller tissues with a poor blood supply. This decreased blood supply is a major reason why ligaments heal **slowly** and incompletely, leading to chronic **pain**. As we age, and as we reduce mobility through lack of exercise, our ligaments get weaker and are more easily injured. However, there's a way to strengthen these weak and damaged ligaments and put an end to chronic **pain**. It's a technique called prolotherapy.

Prolotherapy isn't new. It was originally called sclerotherapy and developed in the 1950s by H.I. Biegelesen to treat varicose veins. But the doctor who is considered the Father of Prolotherapy is George S. Hackett, MD, who wrote a book on it in 1955 and used it extensively to rid his **patients** of **low back pain**. In fact, Dr. Hackett used this technique on more than 10,000 **patients** during his career.

Prolotherapy is not a mainstream approach. Less than 1,500 physicians are using it in this country. Still, former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, MD, who has never been thought of as being on the cutting edge of complementary medicine, thinks prolotherapy is an excellent method of eliminating **pain**. Ron Kennedy, MD, includes prolotherapy in his private practice in Northern California. He found that studies show it actually cures 92 percent of chronic **pain** cases. What's more, it's much less expensive than **surgery**.

Years ago, I met Thomas Dorman, MD at a nutrition seminar in Southern California. I remember being impressed with his knowledge of nutrition, since few doctors even knew how to use it to help their **patients**. But Dr. Dorman was different. He told me at that time that he specialized in a technique called prolotherapy, but I wasn't familiar with it then. It turns out that Dr. Dorman not only did much of the research on prolotherapy, he wrote the textbook for other doctors!

Prolotherapy works by strengthening weak, relaxed ligaments that cause joints to loosen. The muscles around weak ligaments contract to help stabilize the joint. This causes **pain** from tight muscles. You can't just relax these muscles with heat and massage. You need to strengthen the ligaments to stop the muscles from contracting. Dr. Dorman points out that since ligaments remain injured for long periods of time, when these ligaments are treated, people who have had **pain** for many years can be cured. Prolotherapy gives lasting relief because it corrects the cause of the **pain**.

Dr. Dorman has been using prolotherapy for years with seniors who have osteoarthritis, improving their range of motion and decreasing their **pain**. He began using it when he was an internist. In 1987, he published the results of a double-blind study on prolotherapy and **low back pain**. He conducted the study with rheumatologist Robert Klein, MD in Santa Barbara, California on more than 80 **patients** who had at least 10 years of **pain**. Eighty-eight percent of the people who were given prolotherapy treatments had from moderate to marked improvement.

And he's even found a great number of other conditions for which this technique is **appropriate**. Prolotherapy can help osteoarthritis, knee **pain**, **back pain**, neck **pain**, fibromyalgia, old whiplash injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome, degenerated or herniated discs, sports injuries, sciatic **pain**, TMJ (jaw) **pain**, and partially torn tendons, ligaments, and cartilage.

Still, while some people think of prolotherapy as being a miracle, Dr. Dorman cautions that it's not **appropriate** for everyone. For instance, if your **pain** is coming from rheumatoid arthritis, Dr. Dorman says it's not likely to help. Often, dehydration causes joint **pain**, which results in stiffness. So before you go hunting for a doctor who uses prolotherapy, first make sure you're drinking enough water!

How prolotherapy works

This technique consists of injecting an irritant solution (usually made from sugar or salt along with a **painkiller** like lidocaine) into areas where ligaments are weak or damaged -- at the place where ligaments and tendons attach to the bone. What happens next is an example of how the body heals itself, and is why I think prolotherapy is such a clever concept. It actually tricks your body into making stronger, healthier ligaments.

The solution that's injected into the weakened ligament causes a **low-grade** inflammation. The cells that are part of your immune system (called macrophages) then move in to remove the irritant solution and any ligament debris. The job of macrophages is to act as scavengers and remove old cells and cellular debris. When the macrophages are finished cleaning up damaged ligaments, fibroblasts, cells that produce collagen and elasticin, rebuild the ligaments. The new ligament that is rebuilt as a result of these injections is stronger than the original one -- sometimes as much as 40 percent stronger! What's more, the treatments lead to a faster re-growth of cartilage. This means that you're left with stronger, more stable connective tissue and less **pain** both now and in the future.

Don't think that all of this happens in one quick treatment. It doesn't. You might need only four to six treatments to get rid of your chronic **pain**, or you might need more than 10. A doctor who uses this technique can probably give you a good idea of whether or not prolotherapy is **appropriate** for you and, after an initial treatment or two, approximately how many sessions you will need. The good news, Dr. Kennedy notes, is that scientific studies on prolotherapy indicate that it cures chronic **pain** in 92 percent of cases for which it has been deemed **appropriate**. What's so nice about this technique is that it can't hurt you to try it. As C. Everett Koop, MD says, "How could placing a little sugar-water at the junction of a ligament with a bone be harmful to a patient?"

Arthritis in the knee

If it hurts you to walk because you have osteoarthritis in your knee, or damaged ligaments, prolotherapy offers a great deal of hope. A randomized, double-blind, study was recently conducted at the Bethany Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas on a group of people with arthritis in their knees. They were either injected with a 10-percent solution of dextrose with the **painkiller** lidocaine in water, or with the water alone. At the end of a year (with three bimonthly injections), eight out of 13 dextrose-treated knees had no ligament weakness. None at all. That's great news. However, there was good news for all participants who were given the dextrose treatment. Every one of them had less **pain**, swelling, buckling episodes, and better knee flexion range.

People who use prolotherapy know it works because they often notice their joints getting stronger after each treatment as more ligament tissue is being formed. They have more endurance because constant **pain** isn't causing constant fatigue. And they can engage in activities that once caused **pain**. The reason for using prolotherapy is to stabilize joints. The side effect is having your **pain** lessen or disappear.

How much does all of this cost? It depends on how many sessions you need. Dr Kennedy says that a single treatment can range from \$90 to \$200. Even if you need 10 treatments, the cost is considerably less than the \$5,000 or more needed for **back** or neck **surgery**. Some of his **patients'** insurance covers prolotherapy, and you can ask any doctor you find whether or not you will be able to be reimbursed.

Finding a prolotherapy doctor

As I said earlier, there aren't very many doctors who use prolotherapy and you may need to travel to find one. I live in the country, in a little Northern California town called Sebastopol, which is more than an hour north of San Francisco. So you can imagine how surprised I was to find that my personal doctor, an osteopath, suggested prolotherapy for a foot problem, should it become too **painful**.

Then I found Dr Kennedy, who practices prolotherapy in Santa Rosa, just 15 minutes from where I live. So even if you live in an out-of-the-way area, there could conceivably be a doctor familiar with prolotherapy near you. To find one, contact the American Association of Orthopedic Medicine (800-992-2063), The American College for Advancement in Medicine (949-583-7666), or the American College of Osteopathic **Pain** Management and Sclerotherapy (302-996-0300) for a list of doctors experienced with prolotherapy.

But before you pick up the phone, you may want to learn even more about prolotherapy. I suggest Dr Ross A. Hauser's book, Prolo Your **Pain** Away: Curing Chronic **Pain** With Prolotherapy (Beulah Land Press). If you have access to a computer (like one at your local library), you can find more information from Dr Dorman at www.dormanpub.com or www.prolotherapy.com.

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