

The following article was taken from the book "Alternative Medicine: The Definitive Guide" courtesy of the Center for Physical Medicine and Pain Management

RECONSTRUCTIVE THERAPY

Reconstructive therapy uses injections of natural substances to stimulate the growth of connective tissue in order to strengthen weak or damaged tendons or ligaments. As a simple, cost-effective alternative to drug and surgical treatment, reconstructive therapy is an effective treatment for degenerative arthritis, low back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, migraine headaches, and torn ligaments and cartilage.

Joint, tendon, ligament, cartilage, and arthritic problems are among the most common afflictions Americans suffer from today. Many remedies are used to treat those problems, such as rest, medication, traction, exercise, cortisone injections, physical therapy, and surgery, but for many patients these fail to provide lasting relief. In many cases, however reconstructive therapy (also known as sclerotherapy, prolotherapy, or proliferative therapy), a nonsurgical method that stimulates the body's natural healing abilities to repair injured tissues and joints, can provide an answer.

"Ligaments, tendons, cartilage, and bones have poor healing abilities due to the lack of blood supply to these tissues," says William Faber, D.O., Director of the Milwaukee Pain Clinic and a leading authority in the field of reconstructive therapy. "This is why injuries to these areas are so long lasting. When these tissues become damaged, the joint becomes unstable, and in order to compensate, the body forms bony, arthritic spurs. This causes increased friction, increased pain and weakness, and a loss in joint mobility. Further injury often results."

Reconstructive therapy can facilitate the healing process for specific injuries. In the case of injured joints, a local anesthetic and a natural irritant (sodium morrhuate, a purified derivative of cod liver oil), dextrose, phenol, minerals, or other natural substances are injected into areas where ligaments, tendons, and cartilage are torn or weak. "The injection stimulates the body to produce more connective tissue, which helps to strengthen the weak or damaged areas," says Dr. Faber. "As

a result, the patient will often experience less pain and greater strength and endurance."

How Reconstructive Therapy Works

According to Dr. Faber, "Mild, irritating reconstructive solutions cause dilation of blood vessels and a migration of fibroblasts (healing cells) to the injured areas. These healing cells lay down collagen (a structural protein) to repair the area." This regrowth has been substantiated by research studies dating back almost forty years.

In a study conducted in the 1950s by surgeon George Hackett, M.D., 1,600 patients with severe sacroiliac sprain were treated with reconstructive injections. When the patients were examined by independent physicians two to twelve years later, 82 percent had remained free of pain or recurrences. Dr. Hackett's experiments were repeated in 1983 and 1985 by the University of Iowa's Department of Orthopedic Research. Both studies found that the patients' tendons became more firmly attached to the bone and increased in strength and structure by 30 to 40 percent above normal.

In 1987, at the Sansum Medical Clinic of Santa Barbara, CA, rheumatologist Robert Klein, M.D., and internist Thomas Dorman, M.D., conducted a double-blind study of eighty-one patients who suffered from continuous low back pain for more than ten years. They found that 88 percent of the patients injected with a reconstructive solution of dextrose, glycerine, and phenol demonstrated moderate to marked improvement. A similar study, reported in the *Journal of Spinal Disorders*, showed an 80 percent improvement. Both studies supported Dr. Hackett's findings.

Studies conducted by Harold Walmer, D.O., of Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, have also shown that reconstructive therapy increases mechanical strength in ligaments and joints. This may explain why so many patients with advanced degeneration of bones and soft tissues, or those who suffer from a wide range of musculoskeletal problems, have improved so dramatically when given reconstructive injections.

Conditions Benefited by Reconstructive Therapy

Reconstructive therapy has been practiced in the United States for over sixty years as a treatment for America's most common afflictions: Tendon, ligament and arthritic problems. To date, over six hundred thousand patients have been successfully treated with reconstructive therapy. Common symptoms and conditions that respond well to reconstructive therapy include:

- ❖ Degenerative arthritis
- ❖ Back and neck pain
- ❖ Torn ligaments and cartilage
- ❖ Degenerated discs
- ❖ Migraines
- ❖ Bursitis
- ❖ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ❖ Achilles tendon tears
- ❖ Tennis elbow
- ❖ Rotator cuff tears
- ❖ Bunions
- ❖ A wide range of musculoskeletal problems caused by failed surgery, compression fractures, degenerated disks, polio and muscular dystrophy

Reconstructive therapy is also recommended for weak joints; joints requiring a brace; joints that continually pop, snap and grind; or joints that cannot maintain alignment (particularly when chiropractic or osteopathic manipulations fail to help).

Reconstructive therapy can provide a more cost-effective solution to musculoskeletal and joint problems than traditional surgery.

One of Dr. Faber's cases involved a physician who had been experiencing chronic low back pain since the age of fourteen. At the age of thirty he had sprained his neck, worsening his condition, and a cervical laminectomy (removal of a cervical disk) was surgically performed. However, his back problems persisted, and ten years later, he injured his back once again. Diagnosis showed a herniated lumbar disk. Another operation followed, but his back pain persisted, and when it became so severe that he could barely move without pain, he sought reconstructive therapy. The pain was relieved immediately, Dr. Faber reports, with his neck and back steadily strengthening during the days after his first treatment. Further treatment provided more relief. "He told me the reconstructive therapy was the most valuable of any of the treatments he had received and it only cost a fraction of the \$120,000 he had spent on surgery, medications, and other physical therapies," say Dr. Faber.

Another case reported by Dr. Faber involved a college football player who had suffered repeated injuries to his left shoulder. He relied upon various medications and therapies until the pain became too great, and then underwent orthopedic surgery, but his condition worsened. Chiropractic treatments afforded him only temporary relief, and his chiropractor suggested reconstructive therapy. After receiving reconstructive injections, his condition improved dramatically. In fact, in a metered punching test, it was found that he wound up with more strength in the left shoulder than in the right.

James Carlson, M.D., a sports medicine specialist in Knoxville, Tennessee, and past President of the American Association of Orthopedic Medicine, believes that reconstructive therapy is the most effective treatment for Osgood-Schlatter disease, a muscle ailment that strikes adolescents between the ages of eleven and sixteen. "These kids have such severe pain in the knees, they can't participate

in exercise, sports, or dance, and traditional medicine just dictates 'don't do anything athletic,'" says Dr. Carlson. "Reconstructive therapy is the best thing I've ever seen." His own son, an aspiring baseball catcher, couldn't squat down or kneel. After therapy, he made the team as a catcher, and later, became a top school athlete. Another patient of Dr. Faber suffered from lumbar spondylolisthesis (a forward slipping of one vertebrae on to the one below it) for more than two years. He experienced constant pain caused by a break in a vertebra. After receiving reconstructive therapy from Dr. Faber he was pain free. Eight years later he reported no recurrences. Today he does landscaping, hunts, and even waterskis.

What to Expect from Reconstructive Therapy

Reconstructive therapy is estimated to be three to ten times more effective than surgery or joint replacment. Dr. Carlson notes that the pain or discomfort associated with receiving multiple injections is compensated for by the benefits received from reconstructive therapy. According to Kent Pomeroy, M.D., an Arizona physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist, and co-founder and past President of the American Association of Orthopedic Medicine, "Dramatic results should be noted by the patient within the first week of treatment. But if swelling occurs, improvement may not be noticed until the swelling subsides. If marked improvement is not obtained after the first six treatments, then further examination is recommended to find out why the patient's body is failing to reconstruct tissue."

Generally, a patient improves dramatically after the first six injections. Most patients will need twelve to thirty treatments to bring the joint back to full strength and function. The benefits of reconstructive therapy over other methods of treatment include:

- ❖ Eliminating the need for drugs or surgery
- ❖ Stimulating the body's natural healing mechanism, causing natural regrowth of structural tissue

- ❖ A low risk of side effects, when performed correctly
- ❖ Permanent results when full treatment course is completed

Research into the effectiveness of reconstructive therapy is needed. This type of therapy could provide a revolution in orthopedic medicine by offering regeneration rather than surgery.

The Future of Reconstructive Therapy

Although reconstructive therapy has been used to treat a wide range of musculoskeletal conditions for over forty years, its practice has not become widespread in the United States. In recent years, however, according to Dr. Faber, the number of practitioners has been growing, and currently approximately two hundred physicians practice reconstructive therapy.

"One major reason for the slow growth of reconstructive therapy," Dr. Faber suggests, "may be the fact that the substances used in reconstructive therapy are not patented and therefore would not provide the huge profits that other pharmaceutically-backed drug therapies receive. Reconstructive therapy also requires specialized training, and a serious commitment on the part of the physician to master the procedure." Reconstructive therapy can play an important role in the medicine of the future. It may well be the first nondrug, nonsurgical approach to result in a much-needed change in medical treatment of long-lasting musculoskeletal problems, currently addressed by orthopedics, neurosurgery, physical medicine, and physical therapy.

"The initial turning point will be the discovery of reconstructive therapy by professional athletes," according to Dr. Faber. "Although reconstructive therapy is well documented in science and through the case histories of thousands of successful patients, the recovery of a single famous athlete by reconstructive therapy is what's needed to bring the therapy into the spotlight it so richly deserves."