



Treating Arthritis of the Knee with Viscosupplementation

Viscosupplementation is an encouraging option for relieving pain associated with knee osteoarthritis (OA) and restoring patient mobility and improving quality of life.

The Arthritis Foundation reports that 14 million Americans live with symptomatic [knee arthritis](#), the risk of which increases significantly with each decade of life. Left untreated, more than half of these arthritis patients will experience sufficient progression to warrant a knee replacement.

Fortunately, medical technology offers a variety of effective treatments for OA. Today, viscosupplementation is one of the most promising options.

What Is Viscosupplementation?

In the knee, cartilage serves as padding for the joint, cushioning the bones and absorbing much of the shock of walking, running, jumping and twisting. Osteoarthritis is a degenerative disease resulting in the cartilage breaking down or becoming damaged. The damage may be caused by an accident, injury or long-term wear and tear.

In addition, the knee contains a gel-like substance called synovial fluid, which lubricates the joint and reduces friction — much like motor oil does for your car's engine. When cartilage breaks down and synovial fluid levels drop, patients experience knee pain, stiffness, and eventually, bone spurs. Activity levels drop as pain increases, and in time, patients may lose most of their mobility.

Viscosupplementation augments the knee's natural lubrication. Used appropriately, it can significantly reduce pain and slow the progression and damage of OA.

How Is Viscosupplementation Used for Knee Arthritis?

Viscosupplementation uses hyaluronic acid — the essential lubricating component of synovial fluid — to boost the level of this important chemical. The body produces hyaluronic acid (also known as hyaluronate or hyaluronan) naturally; however, over time, production decreases, reducing the synovial fluid's ability to lubricate the joint.

By injecting hyaluronic acid into the synovial fluid, knee lubrication is improved. Some research also indicates that viscosupplementation stimulates the body to increase its natural production of hyaluronate.

Using ultrasound imaging technology, the orthopedic doctor can identify the ideal location to deliver the viscosupplement. Although patients may experience some improvement immediately, the most significant change will take place in the weeks following treatment.



Are You a Good Candidate for Viscosupplementation?

For patients who suffer from mild to moderate osteoarthritis of the knee, viscosupplementation is a highly effective and minimally invasive treatment. The sports medicine physician or joint replacement specialist may recommend this therapy as a part of an overall treatment program that may include diet, exercise, physical therapy, and potentially complementary treatments.

Patients who benefit from this treatment can utilize viscosupplementation every six months. Ongoing treatments can reduce pain, increase mobility and delay the progression of damage from OA.

Because some viscosupplementation solutions are created using avian sources (specifically, sterilized and processed rooster combs), this treatment is may not be available to patients who are allergic to poultry or poultry products. There are synthetic versions of viscosupplementation that would be more suitable for those with avian allergies. Anyone else who is in good overall health may be a good candidate for this treatment.