

# *Orthopaedic Connection*

## **Viscosupplementation**

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### *Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

Did I grab your attention by the strange, hard to pronounce title of this week's article? Good, that was my plan! It is not my habit to use big obscure medical words, but I will explain it, so here goes.

Viscosupplementation is a word that contains twenty letters! It is a technique that injects a medical substance into a joint to improve the patient's synovial fluid already in the joint.

It is used in arthritic joints to relieve pain. Viscosupplementation is used almost entirely in the knee joint.

### **What actually is Osteoarthritis?**

Books have been written about arthritis so I can't explain it in a sentence, but in simplest terms it is a wearing away or breakdown of the articular surface of a joint. All of our movable joints are covered on each side by a cap of wonderful tissue called hyaline cartilage. When the joint surface begins to wear out (for many different reasons) the result is arthritis. Arthritis ranges from a little scuffing or roughness to complete wearing away of the joint surface where the bones begin to touch.

If patients know anything about arthritis it ends there 99% of the time.

But it is more. In osteoarthritis there is usually a significant change in the body's own joint fluid (synovial fluid) that is a deterioration or degrading in the quality of the joint fluid itself.

In this article I am only concentrating on the body's *joint fluid* not the bone changes themselves.

### **Synovial Joint Fluid**

I don't want to lose you, but I need to explain a little more about our joint fluid. There is a natural chemical found in our joint tissues and the joint fluid. Its name is Hyaluronic Acid. It acts like a lubricant and shock absorber in synovial fluid in a healthy joint.

When a knee joint is heading toward arthritis, it begins to lose its smooth surface. It is thought that one of the reasons that the bones begin to rub together and spurs form is because the joint fluid is not providing its cushioning effect. This is a theory and probably correct I believe.

Every joint that hurts isn't arthritis! I think this is a good place to point out that true osteoarthritis is a very specific diagnosis. Patients almost invariably equate anything that hurts around a joint with arthritis. Actually lots of health care providers somewhat reinforce that by calling many aches and pains "arthritis" when they really are not. But I digress.

Orthopaedic Surgeons take a good medical history, do a thorough exam of the joint and surrounding area and take plain x-rays before diagnosing osteoarthritis.

### **Can all Joints have Viscosupplementation?**

At this time viscosupplementation is reserved only for the knee. Why? You will have to check with the FDA. I think it is because it is a large joint and a classic one affected by osteoarthritis. It is easier to treat than the smaller joints.

Since FDA has "approved" viscosupplementation only for the knee, insurance companies won't pay for injection of any other joint. If it is used in another joint like the shoulder the patient has to pay. Most patients say no thanks.

## **My Experience**

There is a lot more information that I need to give you about my experience with viscosupplementation in the office, but it will need to wait for one week. Please come back. Have a good week.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

## **Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.**

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush