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CAN GROWTH FACTORS WITH STEM CELL THERAPY HELP REDUCE MY ARTHRITIS PAIN?

Dr. Kevin Plancher with Plancher Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine explains effects of growth factors with stem cell therapy on joint symptoms.

When pain relievers just don't reduce your arthritis pain enough and you're contemplating a big step – such as joint replacement surgery – it may be time to consider the potential benefits of newer biologic treatments utilizing growth factors with stem cells as another option, according to orthopaedic surgeon Kevin D. Plancher, MD, founder of Plancher Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine.

Arthritis isn't a condition to take lightly. Causing chronic pain, stiffness, swelling and other burdensome symptoms, arthritis affects more than 54 million people in the United States and is the leading cause of disability among adults, according to the Arthritis Foundation. Any joint can develop arthritis, but the knees, hips and small hand joints are most commonly affected.

But in recent years, minimally invasive treatments using growth factors with some stem cells have increasingly come into the forefront. These treatments purport to offer arthritis sufferers another viable option for pain relief when over-the-counter or prescription pain relievers, new long acting steroid injections or other conservative measures don't help the patient alleviate their pain profile, Dr. Plancher says.

“If you've endured arthritis pain for months or years and conservative treatments haven't sufficiently eased your pain, joint replacement surgery may seem like your only option,” he says. “But many arthritis patients might benefit from these therapies, which have helped repair and heal joints in many animal studies.

What do the treatments involve?

Growth factors with stem cell therapy is minimally invasive and fast. It is an office procedure in which these factors and cells are injected into joints damaged

by arthritis to help repair dwindling cartilage and surrounding tissues and to reduce inflammation, therefore reducing pain. “Injections may need to be repeated for benefits to continue,” says Dr. Plancher.

How joints benefit

One of the hottest areas of medical research, especially in the knee joint, is with these growth factors. These therapies are showing promising effects in their ability to attempt to regenerate worn-out tissues such as cartilage or release substances that promote healing in nearby cells. Unfortunately, much of this research is lagging behind anecdotal results.

Unlike pain medications, which simply mask symptoms (if reducing them at all), these treatments are designed to actually reverse the breakdown of joint cartilage that's causing arthritis pain, Dr. Plancher points out. “These cells attempt to stop the degenerative process and further protect the joint,” he adds.

Unlike surgery, injections of these growth factors with stem cells have a low risk of infection. Plus, the scientific literature to date has reported these issues. Many orthopaedic surgeons are excited by this new technology but are holding final judgment until more scientific studies are performed.

Kevin D. Plancher, MD, MPH, is a board-certified knee and shoulder orthopaedic surgeon. He founded Plancher Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine and serves as clinical professor of orthopaedics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. Since 2001, he has been listed annually in the Castle Connolly directory as a “top doctor” in his field.

Plancher Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine is a comprehensive orthopaedics and sports medicine practice with offices in New York City and Greenwich, CT. www.plancherortho.com