



## Banff Sport Medicine

# Hyaluronic Acid Injections

Scan the QR code to watch a short video about HA injections, including tips on post-injection care.



## What is a Hyaluronic Acid injection?

- Hyaluronic acid injections (Durolane, Synvisc, Monovisc, and others), also known as viscosupplementation, are primarily used for the management of osteoarthritis and certain meniscal injuries. Hyaluronic acid is a naturally occurring molecule that is normally present in healthy cartilage (the strong, flexible connective tissue that protects your joints and bones). In unhealthy, injured, or arthritic cartilage, the levels of hyaluronic acids are lower. These injections can help control pain, provide lubrication, act as a shock absorber, and replace hyaluronic acid in the joint. The injection may also stimulate your joint to make more of this important molecule, helping to preserve tissue and slow the progressive joint degeneration. Hyaluronic acid is not a cure for osteoarthritis but can help manage pain and improve joint mobility for an extended period.

### *Why get a HA injection:*

- Hyaluronic acid works best for mild to moderate osteoarthritis in the knee, hip, shoulder, elbow, and ankle, as well as certain meniscal injuries.
- These injections successfully improve symptoms in 75% of patients. The benefits of these injections are gradual, and it may take a few weeks to feel the full effects. Typically, relief lasts for 6 months or in some patients even longer.

## What to know before considering a HA injection

- **Cost Information:** The injection procedure is covered by Alberta Health Care; however, the injection product is not covered. You are allowed to:
  - Bring your own injection by obtaining a prescription, or we can supply the product for you. A receipt and prescription can be provided by our clinic in the event the cost is covered by your supplementary health insurance plan.
- **Medical history:** Before an injection, discuss with your doctor any past allergies, current medication being taken, as well as excess alcohol and/or tobacco use.
- **Allergies:** Please inform your doctor if you have any allergies to poultry products, feathers, or meat, as this may influence which treatment is suitable for you. Allergic reactions are rare but can occur. If you have experienced any allergic reactions to viscosupplementation in the past, be sure to let your doctor know before receiving your injection.
- **Patients with bleeding disorders or infection:** HA is not recommended to patients with known bleeding disorders or to patients with an infection/skin disease around the injection site or joint.
- **What to expect at a HA injection appointment:** On the day of your appointment, please wear comfortable clothing (t-shirt, shorts), that allows easy access to the injection site. Plan to arrive about 10 minutes early to complete the check-in process. While the injection itself only takes a few minutes, most appointments typically last between 15 and 30 minutes.

## Post injection care & expectations

Following an injection, it is normal to experience temporary pain, mild swelling, and/or stiffness as well as warmth or redness localized to the joint. These symptoms may last for three to seven days. During the first week, post-injection care should include:

- **Rest:** Avoid heavy lifting and intense physical activity for one to two days following the injection. You can engage in light moving such as walking. After this period, you can gradually return to normal activity. Your physician will discuss specific protocols with you.
- **Over the counter medication:** Use over-the-counter medication like Acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>), acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin) or ibuprofen (Advil) to manage pain and inflammation.
- **Ice and elevate joint:** Ice wrapped in a towel (do not apply directly to skin) can be applied to the injected joint for 10-15 minutes every hour as required, to help with initial swelling/pain/stiffness.
- **Avoid heat:** Avoid having a hot bath, using a hot tub, or a heating pad on the area for the first 2-3 days following an injection. Showering is completely ok.
- **Relief:** Do not expect an immediate response to viscosupplementation as the response may take a few weeks to fully develop after receiving an injection.

*If symptoms persist, or you are experiencing intense pain, a fever, chills, swelling getting progressively worse, or if you notice a significant change in your well-being, please consult your healthcare provider immediately.*

### What about additional injections?

- **Multiple injections:** It is safe to receive multiple HA injections. Frequency will not make the injections less effective/less safe. However, as your arthritis progresses, injections may not provide the same amount of relief and other treatments may have to be considered (such as surgery in severe cases). Some patients receive multiple injections in a row before feeling the full benefits. Joint relief duration varies between patients, but most feel relief for up to 6 months before needing a repeat injection.
- **Combination therapy:** HA can also be used with other injections such as corticosteroids or platelet rich plasma. Some patients experience better results when using combined therapies.

### Risks of HA injections

#### *Post-injection inflammatory reaction (1 in 10,000 people)*

- This uncommon reaction can occur within 24-hours following a HA injection. Symptoms include increased swelling and pain in the injected joint. There is usually no redness of the overlying skin, although the joint may feel warm.
- Icing the area for up to 20 minutes at a time using an ice pack covered with a towel can be helpful; do not apply ice directly to your skin. Acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>), or an anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen (Advil) can be used to help control the pain.
- If the pain and swelling lasts longer than 3 days, notify your doctor.

#### *Infection (1 in 10,000 injections)*

- The risk of infection is extremely low. Symptoms of infection include a fever and/or chills, pain, bleeding, temporary worsening/flaring of symptoms, tendon/ligament/blood vessel injury, and warmth and redness around the site of injection. Symptoms can occur up to 10 days after the injection.
- If you have any of these symptoms please call our office, the Banff Mineral Springs Hospital, or go to the nearest urgent care or emergency clinic and tell them that you had a viscosupplementation injection.

#### *Allergic reaction*

- An allergic reaction, although extremely rare, can include a rash, itching, hives, or in more severe cases, difficulty breathing and swallowing. Seek medical attention immediately if experiencing allergy symptoms.

*Tissue/Skin necrosis (extremely rare)*

- Tissue necrosis is a very rare yet serious complication from HA injections. Symptoms include edema, painful purple patches and reddish-purple spots, lack of blood flow, and a rash around the injection point.
- Consult a healthcare provider immediately if experiencing symptoms. Treatment may include subcutaneous hyaluronidase to degrade the injected HA in the joint.

*Other adverse effects*

- Other potential short- and long-term adverse effects include but are not limited to: headache, dizziness, rashes, temporary worsening or flaring of symptoms, bleeding, skin discoloration, tendon/ligament/nerve/blood vessel injury.