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TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR TENDON/LIGAMENT INJURIES

There are multiple options for treating tendon injury and pain. Tendon injuries are due to overuse or an acute injury. Acute injuries can be a partial or complete tear or an injury that strains the tendon fibers. Initially there can be inflammation but after time inflammation is less of a problem. The main persistent problem is a change in the tendon structure. Think of a tendon as an elastic rope that connects a muscle to a bone. A ligament connects bone to bone. Injured tendons/ligaments are a frayed rope with disorganization, decreased quality and number of healthy tendon fibers. Treatment can be aimed at the inflammation especially recent injuries or at repairing the “frayed” tendon on ligament.

Inflammation is treated with ice, anti-inflammatory medicine like Advil, Aleve, aspirin or prescription anti-inflammatory medication like Meloxicam and Celebrex. There are side effects with these medicines. Most commonly they are associated with the stomach problems (gastritis or even ulcers) but also can cause problems with kidneys or even the heart. If taking for inflammation it is important to take an anti-inflammatory dose of Aleve ~500 mg twice a day or ibuprofen 800 mg a day. Tylenol/acetaminophen helps pain but not inflammation.

Cortisone treats inflammation and decreases pain. It is usually given with an injection but can be given in a pill for a short course.

Cortisone and anti-inflammatory medication do not repair the injured tendon. They help decrease the inflammation and are more useful for pain early but might impair the healing process.

There are several treatments that help repair the “fraying” pattern of injured tendons and ligaments. This is called regenerative medicine.

Proliferative Injections

Prolotherapy is an injection of a dextrose and lidocaine solution that Dr. Stowers has been using now for over 30 years. It works by irritating the tendon in the area of injury and stimulates the body to repair itself. Similar to how muscles respond to weight lifting. It is like a phone call activating your body to repair itself. Typically 3-5 sets of injects are performed. The success rate is around 85%.

The challenges are that each injection is sore for 2-5 days. You will need at least 3 injections usually administered about 3 weeks apart and you cannot take cortisone, prednisone or anti-inflammatory medicine for at least 6 weeks after the last injection. Ideally 3 months.

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Some insurances do not pay for prolotherapy.

A single injection cost is 100 each time

2-3 injections cost is 150 each time

4-5 injections cost is 200 each time

More than 5 injections cost is 250 each time

PRP injections are more potent than prolotherapy. One shot is also around 85% success. The injection is performed by taking blood out of the arm and then the blood is placed in a centrifuge. A specific setting is used for different areas to concentrate platelets and growth factors. These are injected into the injured tendon. Just like prolotherapy there is initial pain and swelling which resolves over the first week. Benefits are slow taking at least 3-8 weeks. The actual tissue regeneration continues for months. During this time, no anti-inflammatory medicine can be taken. Insurance does not pay for PRP. Each injection set costs \$750. Dr. Stowers has been performing this type of treatment for over 15 years. You may get bruising and will get local inflammation, but he has never experienced a negative lasting side effect. Like all injections, the most common risk is infection. This is extremely rare.

Another regenerative medicine approach is called a percutaneous tenotomy. Dr. Stowers works with a company called Tenex. This is done in the surgery center under local anesthesia. It is performed by making a small incision and using a needle that has ultrasonic energy at the tip specifically designed to remove unhealthy tendon tissue. This is also approximately 85% effective. Following the procedure we use splinting to protect the tendon for the first few weeks. The tendon is repaired by the body and takes 6-10 weeks. It can be supplemented by prolotherapy or PRP if pain persists. All 3 of the regenerative approaches are interchangeable. Insurances vary in which areas they cover.

Dr. Stowers can also do BMAC which is a bone marrow concentrate taken from the posterior aspect of the pelvis. This adds stem cells and adds to the effectiveness of PRP. This is much more expensive but very effective. The cost is \$2,500.

Finally there is open surgical repair for most but not all tendon injuries. These surgeries can also be very effective but typically take time and are much more impactful on the limitations following surgery.

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