

Massage Today

The Benefits of Reconstructive Proliferant Therapy

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Millions of people live in pain and don't know what to do about it. Something profound changes for these sufferers. The pain makes it hard to think, work or play. It saps energy and enthusiasm for life. Frequently, depression sets in. Many of these clients come to us for help. Some we help and some we don't.

For many years, I felt helpless to ease the pain of clients that I and all my colleagues could not help. As my practice grew, I saw people from all around the country who had tried every conceivable therapy, from surgery, to physical therapy, to chiropractic, to osteopathy, to massage therapy, to structural integration and movement modalities like Alexander technique and Feldenkrais practitioners. These people had also tried medication, exercise and meditation. Every treatment had failed for these individuals. Many of the people I saw had been in pain for 15 to 20 years.

When I discovered reconstructive proliferant therapy, I felt like I'd found the golden key to helping many of the clients with intractable pain that I, and everyone else I knew, couldn't seem to help. In my experience, 85 to 90 percent of those for whom nothing seemed to work got well with this therapy if treated by an experienced and skilled physician.

What is reconstructive proliferant therapy and how does it work?

Reconstructive proliferant therapy (also called prolotherapy) is a technique that stimulates the body's ability to repair itself when that process does not occur naturally. Just as a cut or scratch initiates the skin's regenerative processes, a proliferant causes the production of new tissue by stimulating cell reproduction in the connective tissues. Until proliferants were discovered, it was believed to be impossible for connective tissues to regenerate in this way.

The proliferant is injected into the affected ligaments, tendons or joints, and causes local inflammation. This controlled inflammation triggers an accelerated wound-healing process, resulting in new collagen and fibroblastic proliferation (fibroblasts are the cells that actually grow the ligaments and tendons). The new collagen shrinks as it develops, which tightens the structure and makes it stronger.

What kinds of cases respond best to prolotherapy?

Prolotherapy has been shown to be very effective at reducing or eliminating chronic pain in cases where injuries have resulted in painful adhesive scar tissue and/or laxity or weakness of ligaments, tendons or joints. This treatment is especially effective in treating chronic pain in the neck, low back, thorax, shoulders, elbows, wrists, hips, knees and ankles. It also strengthens weak joints by shortening and thickening the ligaments supporting those joints. For example, if a ligament in the knee is damaged and permanently stretched, it cannot effectively hold that joint in place, and therefore leaves the structure

more vulnerable to further injury. The proliferant strengthens the integrity of the joint by tightening the ligament so it can do its job more effectively.

What can a client do to get maximum benefit from prolotherapy?

During proliferant therapy, it is vitally important for the patient to do gentle exercises several times a day, to ensure that the healing and new tissue development take place in the presence of a full range of motion. This can make or break the effectiveness of the treatment. Each area of the body requires particular exercises to make sure the healing is effective. When clients do their exercises daily and don't return to stressful activity too soon, the results are usually excellent.

How long does the treatment process take?

Proliferants are usually slow-acting because they stimulate the body's ability to heal itself. They are most active in the first 3 to 7 days but keep working for months at a slower pace. The number of treatment sessions depends on the part of the body and the severity of the case, ranging from two or three sessions for a wrist to eight or so for the low back. Individuals heal at different rates depending on their age, strength, flexibility, level of stress and nutritional health, so there is some variation in the number of sessions needed by specific clients.

What are the side effects?

Unlike many medicines, proliferants have no side effects and have a lower drug content than aspirin. While there are many different proliferant formulas in use, the most frequently used solution (the Ongley solution developed in 1960) contains common chemical substances that have been tested for safety and effectiveness. The Ongley solution includes dextrose (a pure sugar that serves as the main irritant stimulating connective tissue production), Xylocaine (the numbing medicine your dentist uses), glycerine (to help in blood clotting), and phenol (a proliferant that prevents infection).

How can I connect my clients to prolotherapy professionals?

Since this is a relatively unknown treatment in the United States, it may be difficult to find doctors who are experienced in reconstructive proliferant therapy. Once you have located one, see if he or she has been doing it for at least 5 years. Ask if you can speak to several of the doctor's patients to learn what their experience has been. If you would like a recommendation to an experienced physician, feel free to contact me either by phone (617-576-0777) or email at DrBen@BenBenjamin.com.

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