For When You Hurt

Therapies that may help ease the pain of arthritis

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, osteoarthritis (OA)—the most common form of arthritis—affects more than 30 million adults in the United States. This painful and disabling condition most frequently affects the hands, hips and knees and is caused by the deterioration of cartilage, the rubbery material that cushions the ends of bones. The result is joint pain, swelling and stiffness.

But sometimes, injection therapy or other procedures can help alleviate these symptoms. For example, corticosteroid shots fight inflammation and ease aching knees. However, the effects are only temporary, as the treatment can't repair damaged cartilage or slow the progression of arthritis.

Viscosupplementation and arthrocentesis are two other procedures believed to deliver the same results. The first involves injections of additional hyaluronic acid—a lubricating fluid the body produces—into the joint, while the latter is a technique that removes excess fluid.

Although hyaluronic acid is approved by the Food and Drug Administration and recommended for those with mild to moderate OA of the knee, some studies report that the substance does little or nothing to soothe symptoms. However, experts reason that the treatment might work for some people more than others.

Recently, scientists developed synthetic implants that can be substituted for damaged cartilage. Some folks enjoyed a 91 percent reduction in pain thanks to these replacements and hope the treatment may be a lifelong solution for their arthritis.

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