

PRP Therapy

Accelerated natural healing for tendon and ligament injuries

You hear a pop and feel the pain. Before you can say, “ice pack, please,” your body has already dispatched its own emergency response expert – blood – to the site of the injury.

Inside blood are platelets. These sticky, colorless components allow surface injuries, such as a paper cut, to clot. Contained in platelets are growth factors. It is these growth factors that stimulate cell production and allow many types of injuries – including tears in deep, soft tissues – to heal.

This system, though highly effective for most injuries, leaves certain tissues at a biological disadvantage. Because tendons, ligaments and some other parts of your musculoskeletal system have a limited blood supply, growth factors may not reach the injury site in sufficient quantities to promote rapid or complete cell repair. The result can be a longer or inadequate recovery, which may ultimately result in a need for surgical intervention.

Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) is a concentration of a patient’s own platelets and growth factors used to improve the healing environment for certain tendon, ligament and other orthopedic conditions. This concentrate is also referred to as “autologous conditioned plasma (ACP).”

Professional and amateur athletes value PRP therapy for its ability to help accelerate recovery from certain injuries, reduce the need for surgery and allow a quicker return to sport. However, anyone with a tendon or ligament injury may be considered a candidate for PRP therapy.

Improving the healing environment with PRP therapy

For more than 20 years, concentrated platelets have been used to help accelerate recovery following injury or surgery. Heart surgeons first used this treatment to promote wound healing and minimize blood loss. Specialists in many other disciplines, including orthopedics, followed.

Currently, some joint surgeons use concentrated platelets in patients to decrease bleeding at the surgical site, reduce the need for narcotic therapy after surgery, and improve range of motion. In sports medicine, PRP therapy has been recommended as an alternative to surgery in patients with chronic elbow tendonitis, a category of injuries that includes tennis elbow. For other tendon and ligament injuries, there are examples of PRP therapy accelerating injury recovery in athletes and allowing a faster return to sport.

Who should consider PRP therapy?

You may want to consider PRP therapy if you have been diagnosed with an injury to a tendon (attaches muscle to bone) or to a ligament (connects bone to bone). The injury can be either recent or chronic.

Some common diagnoses include:

- Tennis elbow, also called lateral elbow epicondylitis
- Golfer’s elbow, also called medial elbow epicondylitis
- Bursitis or impingement of the shoulder
- Jumper’s knee, also called patella tendonitis
- Achilles’ tendonitis, located in the ankle
- Plantar fasciitis, a common problem in the foot
- Any ligament strain or sprain

Early data suggests that concentrated platelets also may be beneficial in the treatment of arthritis in any joint.

How is the procedure performed?

If you believe you may be a candidate for PRP therapy, your problem will first be evaluated by your Tri Rivers physician, who will discuss the benefits and risks of treatment with you. You will then be scheduled for a return appointment, at which time the procedure will be performed.

Prior to treatment, you will be advised to discontinue the use of anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen, one week prior to your injection. **Please notify your physician if you have an allergy to epinephrine or bupivacaine (marcaine).**

Similar to a blood test, the procedure can be performed in Tri Rivers’ office in about 30 minutes. A small amount of blood is removed from your arm and specially prepared to separate the platelets from other components. The concentrated platelets are injected into the injured area, where they work by releasing growth factors to improve healing.



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What happens after treatment?

Many patients return to work the same day. A splint may be needed temporarily to stabilize and support the injection site. Any localized soreness and discomfort can usually be relieved with ice and elevation of the affected area. Though uncommon, more severe pain may occur from the injection. This can be treated with prescription medications.

You will be advised to decrease activities for a day or so and discontinue the use of anti-inflammatory medications for six weeks.

One week following treatment, patients usually begin a rehabilitation program to further promote healing. A return to full activity will depend on your condition. PRP therapy can accelerate healing of acute injuries, but chronic problems may still require a longer recovery period. Your Tri Rivers physician will provide guidance on how quickly you can safely resume your activities.

In general, patients can expect to see significant improvement in symptoms and a dramatic return of function. Traditional treatments such as medications, cortisone injections or surgery may no longer be needed.

Are there risks associated with PRP therapy?

Though uncommon, the risks of PRP therapy are similar to that of any injection. They include pain, infection, persistence or worsening of symptoms, blood clot, nerve injury, skin discoloration, calcification, scarring, loss of the fat in the affected area, and allergic reaction.

If you experience these or other side effects, please contact your Tri Rivers physician toll-free at 1-866-874-7483.

Is this treatment covered by insurance?

Insurance companies will typically cover your first evaluation with the physician. Like other newer procedures, however, most insurance companies do not cover PRP therapy. Patients who choose to undergo PRP therapy must pay for the treatment out of pocket. For our patients' convenience, Tri Rivers accepts cash, personal checks, MasterCard® and Visa®.

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Accelerated Healing the Natural Way

S. Joshua Szabo, M.D., a sports medicine and shoulder specialist at Tri Rivers Surgical Associates, is one of only a few physicians in the western Pennsylvania area now offering PRP therapy as a treatment option for ligament, tendon and other orthopedic injuries. Dr. Szabo's goal is to foster healing through minimally invasive techniques in an anatomic or natural manner. PRP therapy is certainly consistent with his philosophy.

Learn more

To learn whether PRP therapy is appropriate for you, please contact Tri Rivers toll-free at 1-866-874-7483. Our phone receptionist will be happy to schedule an appointment for you with Dr. Szabo. You may also request an appointment by visiting our website at www.tririversortho.com and clicking on the "Request an Appointment" link.

References

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