

Hyaluronic Acid Injections for the Knee

Also called “gel shots” or viscosupplementation. Brand names include Synvisc, Euflexxa, Durolane, Monovisc, Orthovisc, Gel-One, Supartz, GenVisc and others.

What is it?

Hyaluronic acid (HA) is a slippery, gel-like substance found naturally in the fluid that lubricates and cushions your knee. In worn or injured joints, this fluid thins and loses its ability to protect the cartilage. An HA injection adds a concentrated dose directly into the joint to improve lubrication, reduce pain and stiffness, and help you stay active. It is not a steroid and does not carry the blood-sugar or cartilage concerns of repeated cortisone shots.

When do we use it?

FDA-APPROVED USE

Knee osteoarthritis

Pain from arthritis (“wear and tear”) of the knee that has not improved enough with exercise, physical therapy, weight management, anti-inflammatory medicine, bracing or a cortisone injection.

This is the use insurance plans, including Medicare, typically cover.

OTHER USES YOUR PHYSICIAN MAY RECOMMEND

- Early cartilage wear or softening (chondromalacia), including behind the kneecap
- Cartilage injuries or defects
- Degenerative meniscus tears, or after meniscus surgery
- Recovery after knee arthroscopy
- Patients who should limit steroid injections (for example, diabetes)

These are “off-label” uses. Research is more limited, and insurance usually will not pay.

What to expect

The treatment

1 to 5 injections, depending on the product, usually given a week apart. Each visit takes about 15 minutes. Fluid may be drawn off first.

Results

Relief builds gradually over 2 to 6 weeks and may last up to 6 months or longer. Not everyone responds. A series can be repeated if it helped.

Side effects

Most common: temporary soreness, swelling or warmth at the knee. Rare: a larger flare-up or infection. Tell us about any allergy to eggs, poultry or

How to Get Your Injections

How you obtain and pay for HA injections depends mainly on your diagnosis and your insurance. Our staff will help you choose the right path before your first injection.

Why your diagnosis matters

Insurance plans, including Medicare, generally cover HA injections **only for knee osteoarthritis**, and often only when X-rays show arthritis, at least 3 months of other treatment has not helped, and a cortisone injection has failed or is not an option. Many plans also require prior approval. We must bill your insurance using your true diagnosis, so if you are being treated for another condition, insurance will usually not pay.

Your options

1 Through your insurance · knee osteoarthritis

We verify your benefits and request prior authorization. The medication is supplied by our office or shipped to us by your plan's specialty pharmacy. You pay your usual deductible, copay or coinsurance for the medication and the visit.

2 Self-pay through our office · any diagnosis

One set price covers the medication and the injection visits. Our staff will give you the current price before your first injection. Medicare patients will sign an Advance Beneficiary Notice (ABN) confirming they understand the treatment is not covered.

3 Prescription through a pharmacy · often the lowest cost

We send a prescription to a pharmacy. The pharmacy calls you for payment, then ships the medication directly to our office. The injection visit is billed separately by our office. Delivery usually takes a few business days, so plan ahead.

Good to know

- HSA and FSA cards can usually be used for any option.
- Ask us for a written cost estimate before you start.
- If insurance denies a covered diagnosis, we can help you appeal.

Questions? Contact Dr. McCarthy's office

New York: 523 East 72nd St, 6th Floor · **646-714-6360**

Stamford: 1 Blachley Rd · **203-705-2928**
mccarthyoffice@hss.edu