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HOW TO AVOID SURGERY AT ALL COSTS

With regenerative medicine and cellular rehabilitation

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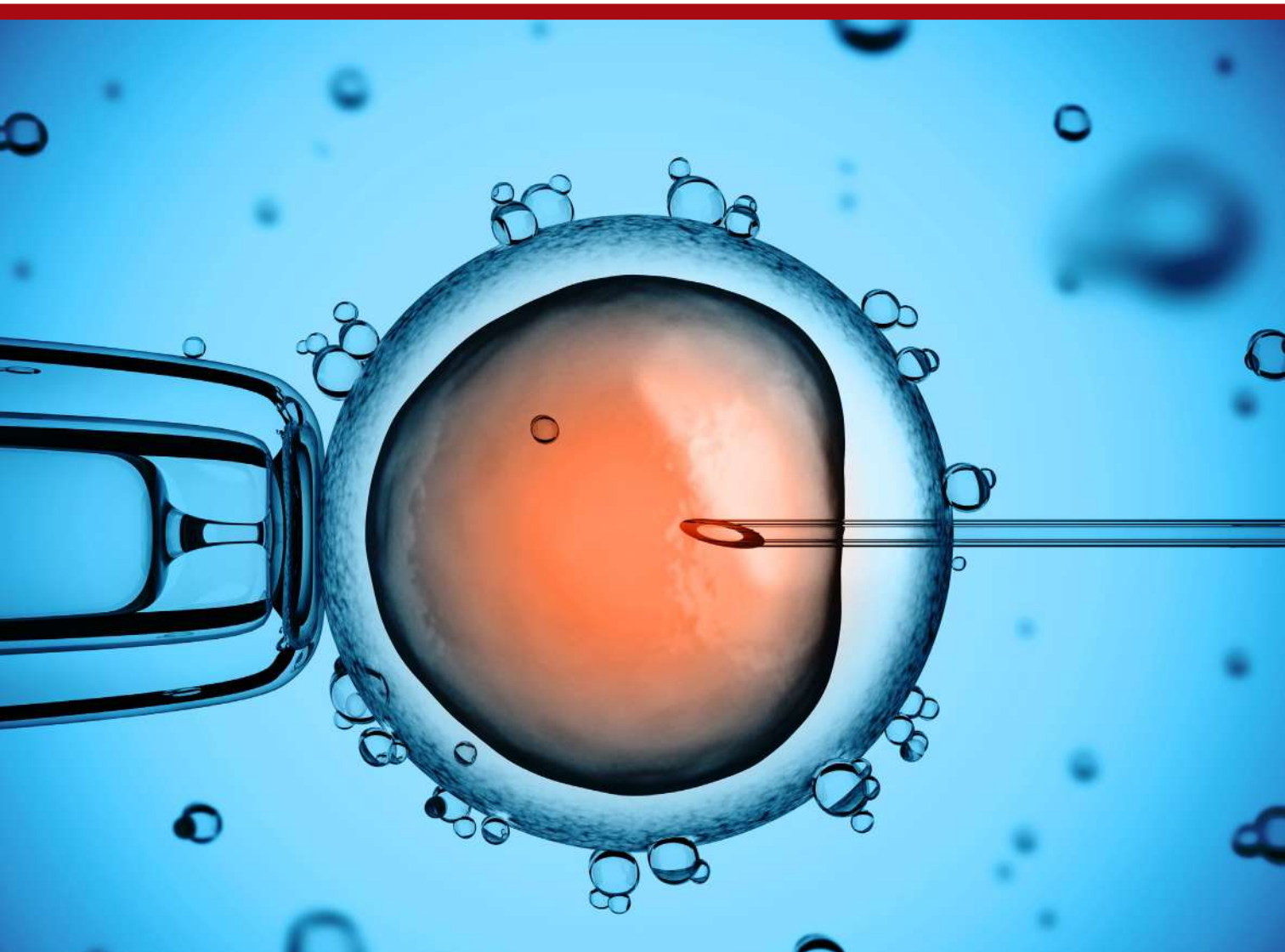

A controversial new trend in medicine called stem cell therapy is beginning to take flight, and some of the world's most beloved golfers are getting on board. A new arrival to modern medicine, this therapeutic procedure, along with platelet-rich plasma (PRP) and prolotherapy, all fall under the umbrella of regenerative medicine, or "replacing or regenerating human cells, tissues or organs to restore or establish normal function."

As a nonsurgical solution with a massive success rate and very little downtime, stem cell therapy has for many become the desired alternative to going under the knife, placing it at the top of this regen med hierarchy. Not everyone is eligible for these medical procedures, though, and you should always consult your doctor when considering your treatment options. Doing your own research is also essential, so let's dive in to understand exactly what regenerative medicine is and how you can achieve transformational outcomes when combined with physical therapy, all while avoiding invasive surgical procedures.

What Is Regenerative Medicine?

For those who do not come from a background of medicine or science, the concept of regenerative medicine can be hard to grasp. To simplify, damaged tissue is replaced at the cellular level to repair and restore optimal function of our biological systems. Typically, these cells can be harvested from two different sources, adult cells that come from your body's own tissues or amniotic fluid. Adult cells come from either bone marrow or adipose tissue (fat), and amniotic mesenchymal cells come from the fluid-filled sac surrounding a fetus. These are not the same as embryonic stem cells, as the mother donates this fluid after the baby has already been born.

Once the cells have been harvested, they go through a purification process and are then ready to be injected for the renewal and regrowth of damaged tissues from conditions such as osteoarthritis; soft tissue or intra-articular injuries, including meniscus and cartilage; damaged tendons and ligaments; sacroiliac pain; tennis elbow; golfer's elbow; rotator cuff injuries; wound healing; hip pain; neck pain; low back pain; and various other painful conditions.

PRP injections are a similar procedure, except they are acquired through a much easier process than stem cells because they come from your own blood. You can do the entire procedure, from harvest to injection, in your doctor's office during one visit. In some cases, your physician may want to utilize a combination of stem cell therapy and PRP injections to optimize your tissue healing. However, if you decide not to combine the two, you will likely need several rounds of treatment to feel long-term relief.

Does Regenerative Medicine Work?

A few years ago, I had severe pain in my right thumb from a chronically inflamed tendon due to overuse. As a physical therapist, I rely heavily on my hands for the skilled manual work that I do daily, and all my attempts to conservatively treat the issue were ineffective. I decided to try PRP, and, yes, it was painful and slightly expensive, but it was worth every penny. I was sore for about a day or two, but soon after, I felt almost immediate relief and have not had any problems since.

I realize now that the overuse was a result of poor mechanics during my treatments, so I worked on strengthening my wrist and hands and also on improving my mechanics and how I was positioning my hands as I worked on patients, which in turn reduced the amount of stress I placed on the thumb. That's when I really became serious about regenerative medicine because if it worked for me, then other people might find success in it, too.

I did my homework and spent many hours reading and learning about this type of medicine through evidence-based clinical trials and other authentic research studies. It took another year or so before I found a doctor I could trust to refer my patients and even my friends and family to, but once we began working together, it was one success story after the next.

So does it work? Absolutely. The treatment is costly but with minimal risks and downtime. Since you don't have to deal with the traumas caused by surgery, which often last long term, it is a no brainer. With the right team of doctors and clinicians and the appropriate protocols in place for therapy following the treatment, it is possible to continue living a quality and active lifestyle.

Take Jack Nicklaus, for example, a world-famous golfer who we all know has suffered tremendously with lower back pain so severe that he could no longer swing a golf club. After receiving a combination of stem cell injections and physical therapy, he has since publicly reported that his longstanding back pain has been completely resolved, and he is now back to playing golf.

How Can Physical Therapy Benefit Me After Regenerative Medicine Procedures?

While stem cell therapy and PRP injections are intended to solve your pain problems, you should also remember how you became injured in the first place. Most stem cell patients opt for treatment once chronic damage and failed healing of tissues have occurred, which means gradual injury developed over time and is usually the result of physical dysfunctions that were ignored or never properly addressed. The good news is, this is your second chance to do what you should have done years ago and participate in an injury prevention and corrective rehabilitation program to resolve the issue once and for all.

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Get Back To Doing What You Love

When it comes to getting rid of your pain and getting back to doing what you love, you have options, and regenerative medicine provides a promising solution for those who want to return to what they love doing without the painful inconvenience of surgical procedures and months of recovery that follow. And while regenerative medicine will lay the foundation for rapid cellular repair and pain elimination, physical therapy is your key to long-term success and sustainability for a pain-free future. Keep in mind, there are cases where surgery may be necessary, and it's important to discuss all your potential treatment options with your medical provider so you can select the one that is best for you.

If you still have questions or would like to learn more after reading this article, my regenerative medicine team will take your emails and answer your questions. Just email us through golftipsmag@gmail.com. We look forward to serving you. **GT**

ASK THE DOC

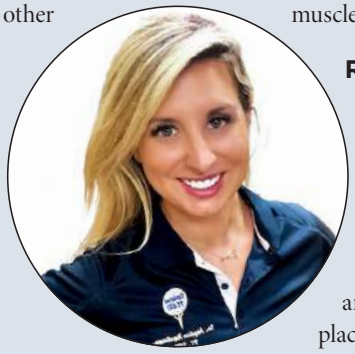
With Dr. Angelica Napolitano, PT, DPT, aka the "Golf Doc"

Welcome to our "Ask the Doc" column, where I answer real questions from real people regarding their golf game and the physical limitations that may impact their ability to perform. I am a board-certified doctor of physical therapy and golf rehab and performance specialist. Each month, I will choose questions at random to answer. To enter your question for future editions, please email golftipsmag@gmail.com and keep a lookout each month to see if your question was featured.

Q: *In 2017, I began working out three times a week with a personal trainer to help me gain strength for a better golf swing. He focused a lot on heavy weightlifting because he claimed it would give me more power in my swing, but I ended up developing severe shoulder pain and was diagnosed with a "possible" torn rotator cuff. After two cortisone injections in two years, my shoulder is almost pain free, and I have given up the weights for bands but feel like my strength hasn't really returned to what it was before this injury. What are your recommendations for overcoming this hurdle? And is it even possible?*

—Tim H., Orlando, FL

A: Thanks for your question, Tim. The short answer is yes, it is possible to regain and rebuild your strength following an injury, especially if the injury was nonsurgical. However, you may experience certain side effects with cortisone injections, one of which can weaken your muscles and tendons. This usually happens with prolonged and long-term use of the steroid, but it can still happen after even just one injection. In the future, I would look into other options as a method to help you eliminate pain that has little to no side effects and is more of a long-term solution.



Here are my top three recommendations for you to incorporate into your lifestyle and focus on in order to restore your strength: sleep, nutrition and resistive or weight-bearing exercise.

Sleep:

As we sleep, our brain recharges and several of our most important biological functions take place. In the case of gaining and restoring strength, sleep is important because specific hormones are released, like human growth hormone. This hormone plays a key role in muscle growth and repair after strenuous workouts and other daily catabolic demands that we place on ourselves. It's important to catch those deep ZZZs, though, so turn off the blue lights at least an hour before bed so you can sleep deeper.

Nutrition:

As we age, we lose the ability to break down and metabolize proteins, contributing to decreased muscle mass and strength. A diet rich in high-quality proteins is crucial throughout the aging process not only to prevent muscle loss but also to maintain a healthy weight. Healthy animal proteins are a good source for this because they contain an abundance of leucine, the amino acid most responsible for synthesizing muscle tissue.

Resistive exercise:

This is a no-brainer and is widely understood by the general population. Loading the tissue regularly through weight-bearing and/or resisted exercises places healthy catabolic demands on our tissues, which require a good diet and sleep for optimal repair and growth. See how this all links together? But a vital piece of information you must understand to achieve continued strength and muscle growth is the overload principle. This principle requires you to use the acronym FITT to overload your muscles on a weekly basis by increasing one of these four areas for sustained gains: frequency, intensity, duration or type. Follow this principle and increase one of those four areas each week by 10%, and you should begin noticing long-term changes. A good tip for beginners would be to start off with calisthenics (bodyweight exercises), which give your body a good foundation to build on as it focuses on form and will promote strong functional movement patterns. Good luck! **GT**

If you're interested in learning more or would like to have your questions answered in the next edition, please email me at golftipsmag@gmail.com and stay tuned for future column

DISCLAIMER: *The advice and recommendations given here are intended to be purely educational and not to serve as or replace any medical advice given by your doctor or any other medical professional. Please consider the risks before trying any of the recommended suggestions and understand that Golf Tips Magazine and the author of this column are not to be held responsible or liable should any persons attempt to recreate this advice with resultant harm and/or physical consequence or repercussion. We advise that you consult with your doctor for proper medical clearance before any attempts are made and please do so at your own risk.*