

PEARLS



Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

Effectiveness of prolotherapy injections for chronic low back pain uncertain

Clinical question

Are prolotherapy injections for chronic low back pain effective?

Bottom line

The evidence is conflicting. When used alone, prolotherapy is not an effective treatment. When combined with spinal manipulation, exercise, and other co-interventions, prolotherapy may improve chronic low-back pain and disability (NNT* = 3).

* NNT= number needed to treat to benefit one individual.

Caveat

The data come from five small trials. Co-interventions confounded interpretation of results and clinical heterogeneity in the trials prevented pooling of results. Minor side effects, such as increased back pain and stiffness, were common but short-lived.

Context

Prolotherapy injections involve repeatedly injecting ligaments with compounds such as dextrose and lidocaine. The rationale is to stimulate the body's natural healing process by causing controlled acute inflammation in the areas injected.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Dagenais S, et. al. Prolotherapy injections for chronic low back pain. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2007, Issue 2. Article No. CD004059. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004059.pub3.

Note: This review contains five studies involving 366 participants.

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