

Bursa Injection Therapy: A Targeted Approach to Pain Relief

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Introduction

Joint pain is a frequent complaint that can interfere with mobility, work, and daily activities. In many cases, the source of pain is inflammation of the bursa—small, fluid-filled sacs that cushion bones, tendons, and muscles near joints. When a bursa becomes inflamed, the condition is known as bursitis, leading to pain, swelling, and restricted movement. While conservative treatments such as rest, ice, and anti-inflammatory medications are often effective, persistent or severe cases may require more direct intervention. Bursa injection therapy, most commonly involving corticosteroid injections, is a well-established treatment that provides targeted relief from bursitis and related conditions.

Understanding Bursa Injection Therapy

Bursa injection therapy involves delivering medication directly into the inflamed bursa. These injections typically contain:

Corticosteroids: Powerful anti-inflammatory agents that reduce swelling and irritation.

Local anesthetics: Provide immediate but temporary pain relief.

By targeting the affected bursa directly, this therapy can provide faster and more effective relief than oral medications, which affect the whole body and may cause more side effects.

Indications for Bursa Injection Therapy

Bursa injections are recommended when bursitis does not respond adequately to rest, ice, physical therapy, or medications. Common conditions treated include:

Shoulder bursitis (subacromial bursitis)

Hip bursitis (trochanteric bursitis)

Elbow bursitis (olecranon bursitis)

Knee bursitis (prepatellar or pes anserine bursitis)

Ankle bursitis (retrocalcaneal bursitis)

Patients experiencing significant pain that limits movement or sleep often benefit most from this procedure.

The Procedure

Bursa injection therapy is typically performed in an outpatient or clinical setting:

Preparation: The injection site is cleaned and sterilized.

Localization: The clinician may use palpation or imaging guidance (ultrasound or fluoroscopy) to accurately target the inflamed bursa.

Injection: A mixture of corticosteroid and anesthetic is injected directly into the bursa.

Post-procedure care: Patients are usually observed briefly and can return home the same day.

The procedure is generally quick, minimally invasive, and causes only mild discomfort.

Effectiveness of Bursa Injections

Most patients experience noticeable relief within a few days of the injection. Benefits may last from several weeks to several months, depending on the severity of inflammation and individual response. In some cases, multiple injections may be necessary over time, but physicians typically limit the number to avoid potential side effects of repeated steroid use.

Risks and Side Effects

Although generally safe, bursa injection therapy does carry some risks:

Pain or soreness at the injection site for a short period.

Skin changes, thinning, or discoloration near the injection site.

Infection, though rare, can occur.

Tendon weakening or rupture with repeated injections near tendons.

Systemic steroid effects, such as elevated blood sugar, especially in diabetic patients.

Careful patient selection and adherence to safe injection practices minimize these risks.

Role in Comprehensive Care

Bursa injection therapy is often part of a broader management plan. Along with injections, patients are encouraged to:

Rest and avoid aggravating activities.

Use ice therapy for flare-ups.

Engage in physical therapy to strengthen surrounding muscles and improve joint mechanics.

Correct posture and body mechanics to reduce stress on joints.

Address underlying conditions such as gout, rheumatoid arthritis, or repetitive strain from work.

By combining injections with lifestyle and rehabilitative strategies, patients can achieve more sustained relief and reduce the risk of recurrence.

Conclusion

Bursa injection therapy is an effective and targeted treatment for bursitis that offers rapid pain relief and improved mobility when conservative measures are insufficient. While not without risks, it is generally safe and can provide lasting benefits, especially when combined with physical therapy and preventive strategies. For individuals struggling with persistent joint pain due to bursitis, bursa injections offer a valuable option to restore function, improve quality of life, and support long-term joint health.