

# *Dr. Rick Balharry*

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## **What is prolotherapy?**

Prolotherapy is short for proliferation therapy. By this, we mean that we are trying to proliferate (increase) the healing cells of your body. In this case, this is specifically related to the ligaments.

## **What do ligaments do?**

Ligaments surround all our joints. They protect the joint by limiting its range of movement. They also have a large number of nerve endings so that if they are stretched, they cause pain. This tells our body to change something to protect the joint from damage.

## **How are ligaments injured?**

Our ligaments become slacker just with the passage of time and the stress on the ligaments from our erect posture and from daily activities. They can also be injured by trauma.

## **Will I benefit from this treatment?**

First, we have to find out if you are a candidate for treatment by prolotherapy. It is important that you see your Doctor, Physiotherapist or Chiropractor for proper assessment. This often takes more than one visit. The more information that I have when you visit me, the better judgment I can make about your treatment.

## **What are the injections?**

The injections consist of a mixture of Novocaine, which is a local anaesthetic, and Dextrose. The Dextrose solution is a strong enough concentration to irritate the ligaments. This sets off inflammation at the area, which is the first part of the healing process. The contents of the injections are very safe. The areas that I inject are also very safe. Ligaments only grow where they are attached to bone. I therefore have to feel the bone with my needle, meaning that I know exactly where the injection is going.

## **Are there any risks?**

The common risks, when puncturing our skin, namely bleeding and infection, are very rare with this procedure, due to the small diameter of the needle that I use. It is possible to enter the spinal canal, but I always check for this before injecting. If this happens, it may result in a headache for a period of time. The other possible risk is the possibility, when injecting in the chest part of your back, of puncturing a lung. This is rare. A very small percentage of the population is allergic to local anaesthetic agents. If you think you are, *please let me know!* And an even smaller percentage of people are allergic to cane sugar, which is the source of medical Dextrose. Some people have expressed a concern about becoming too tight after the injections – this is not possible.

## **Is this painful?**

The injections are painful, but the local anaesthetic removes the pain in about two minutes. In spite of this, or if you are having many levels injected, you may feel unable to tolerate the pain. If so, we will discuss alternatives. This may mean that you take a pain killer by mouth (e.g. Tylenol 3) some time before your appointment time. You may ask for a mild relaxant, such as Ativan. If this is not enough, I may offer you a narcotic pain killer given to you by intravenous injection. This may leave you feeling slightly drowsy and/or nauseated.

It is better if you do not have to drive yourself home if you come from afar. You should be pain free for 1–2 hours after the injection, but you may feel a little stiff. If you are not driving, it is easier to change position. If you have had an injectable pain killer, *you cannot drive*.

When the freezing wears off, your back will feel funny, but not necessarily painful. It helps however to bring with you, a pain killer or pain killer/muscle relaxant combination that you can take on the way home. Please do not use anti-inflammatory pain killers (Advil, Ibuprofen ASA etc.). Many people find that ice on the area helps afterwards. If so, please bring your own ice packs. Our ice packs are for use in the Clinic only. You should arrange an appointment with your physiotherapist or chiropractor for 2-3 days after your injection. This may help to relieve any pain that you may have from muscle spasm.

### **Appointments**

To arrange appointments, please have your referral sent to our office. This letter should clearly state your name, address, daytime phone number, and your Family Doctor's name. My office will contact you by letter, fax, or phone. If you do not hear from our Office within about four weeks, please call us to let us know. Self referral is also possible, but you must clearly state that the appointment is a consultation on your back (or other joint) for prolotherapy.

You should know that W.C.B. tends not to cover the costs of prolotherapy unless you make prior approval with them.

Your first appointment will be a consultation and possible treatment. At that visit, I will review your problem as related to me by your referring Health Care Provider and/ or yourself. I will examine you and discuss a treatment plan. If you miss this appointment, we may not be able to continue with your course of injections. Please do not miss appointments for injections as I do book a reasonable amount of time for these injections and it may be difficult to reschedule your appointment. If there is an unavoidable reason for you needing to miss an appointment, please notify us so that we may reschedule your appointment time. It is important to give yourself time to reach my Office. I try to keep my appointment schedule as tight as possible so that people are not kept waiting. Plan to arrive at least 10 minutes prior to your appointment, please notify us so that we may reschedule your appointment time. If you are late, *we may not be able to fit you in, regardless of the distance you may have traveled*.

### **What should I wear and bring with me?**

You should wear loose fitting clothing that allows easy access to your whole spine, or other joints as indicated. This will also be more comfortable afterwards. Expensive (white) shirts or blouses are not a good idea as there is often some pinpoint bleeding after the injections, which could stain your clothes.

If ice helps you, please bring your own icepack. You cannot borrow the ice packs from our Clinic. Bring a painkiller or painkiller/muscle relaxant with you, for your trip home.

### **What are the costs?**

Unfortunately, Alberta Health Care does not cover the cost of Prolotherapy. As a result, the full cost of the procedure and the materials are at your own cost. I will inform you of all costs before starting any procedure. Payment must be made at the time of the visit. We accept Visa, Mastercard, Cash and Debit for your convenience.

In summary, Prolotherapy is a relatively safe procedure that may help to strengthen slack ligaments. If ligament laxity is your problem, you may gain some benefit from this procedure. Proper assessment and follow up care by your Physiotherapist or other Health Care Provider is very important. Please read this information very carefully as it is important that you understand our process. Only this way can we manage to see as many people as we can in the time that the day provides. I hope that we are able to offer you some help with your problem.

For your information, I am a General Practitioner with special interests in surgery, cosmetic skin care, and Prolotherapy. I introduced Prolotherapy in to my Practice in 1981 with the help of local physiotherapists. Since that time our Prolotherapy practice has expanded considerably. As a result, I have gained a high degree of expertise in the procedure, treating many different joint areas of the body. Over this time, the incidence of side effects from this procedure has been extremely low and the benefits have been considerable for the vast majority of patients.