Intradiscal PRP Injection for Discogenic Low Back Pain:
An Introduction for Patients

What is PRP?

Platelet-rich plasma or PRP injection is a procedure in which we use your own blood to treat a painful condition. A small amount of blood is drawn and then placed in a centrifuge for processing. Much of the plasma and red blood cells are removed to obtain a high concentration of platelets which hold the growth factors used to promote healing. We then inject your own platelet-rich plasma back into the specific area causing your pain. Studies have shown that PRP releases a high concentration of growth factors and even stimulates stem cells which help to heal injured or degenerated tissues.

What is intradiscal PRP injection?

Up to about half of chronic low back pain is felt to stem from the intervertebral disc, specifically from small tears in the outer portion of the disc. This is often referred to as “discogenic pain.” Intradiscal PRP is a procedure in which we use platelet-rich plasma in hopes of healing the disc tissue. If your physician feels that your back pain may be stemming from the intervertebral disc, you may be a candidate to try PRP.

What occurs during the intradiscal PRP procedure?

Immediately prior to the treatment, your blood will be drawn and processed. Some patients are given oral or IV sedation at their request before the spinal injection portion of the procedure. The region to be injected is numbed with a local anesthetic. Under x-ray guidance, a needle is placed into the disc or discs that are felt to be causing your pain. A small amount of contrast dye, antibiotic, and anesthetic is injected into the disc. The PRP previously prepared from your own blood is then injected into the disc. All of this is performed in our office. Although the spinal procedure itself takes about 30 minutes, the entire process takes about 2-3 hours.

Would intradiscal PRP help me?

We begin the process by determining if we feel your pain is likely coming from the intervertebral disc. We make this determination from your clinical history, physical exam, imaging, and other diagnostic tests. Research has shown that PRP is likely helpful for conditions in other areas of the body with similar structural make up as intervertebral discs. Studies of PRP on disc tissue have demonstrated the healing properties. An ongoing trial of PRP for patients with discogenic low back pain has shown promising preliminary results. However, we will not know the extent of its benefit without further studies. The physicians at APM Spine and Sports are conducting a study to help evaluate this exciting treatment option. Before considering participating in this study, you should be aware of all the risks and potential benefits as well as any alternative treatment options for your condition. Our research physicians and staff will be happy to discuss these with you.