Stem cells can accelerate healing, reduce inflammation, and prevent scarring. But, not all treatments are the same. Make sure you ask these questions when considering stem cell therapy.

1. Are you a good candidate for Stem Cell Therapy?
Stem cells can be derived from the patient, from postnatal tissues after a normal birth such as the umbilical cord or amniotic sac. Stem cells play a key role in healing and promote tissue generation and can help patients avoid or postpone surgery.

However, stem cell therapy cannot fix everything and not every patient is a candidate for stem cell treatment. For example, an arthritic knee can become ‘bone on bone’, and when severe or associated with deformity, surgery may be the best option. In other cases, to maximize results, it is necessary to address significant health issues first—e.g., getting blood sugar under control for patients with Diabetes, losing weight to reduce the mechanical load on the lower back, knees or hips—will result in a much better outcome.

An expert, conscientious physician takes the time to properly evaluate you to determine whether you are a good candidate. This should include a thorough review of your case history, physical exam, MRI or other imaging studies, and assessment of other factors that influence the success of regenerative treatments, such as nutrition and lifestyle.

2. What pre-treatment regimens are offered to optimize your stem cell therapy?
The effectiveness of stem cells is limited to the amount of support they receive from their environment—the plasma, organs, gastrointestinal tract. Your physician addresses your nutritional needs, including dietary changes and supplementation to reduce inflammation, improve digestion and reduce stress. Taking time to do this prior to stem cell therapy will give the cells the healthiest environment in which to work. Post-treatment regimens will also accelerate and promote your healing.

3. Who is performing the treatment? What is their training? How experienced is your physician?
The fact is that not everyone has the training and expertise to safely and effectively perform stem cell treatments. It’s not major surgery, but stem cell therapy is invasive enough that experience and advanced training is critical to minimize the risk of infection and complications while maximizing the benefits. Ask your doctor to share with you his or her training in stem cell therapy. Make sure to also ask, how long the doctor has been performing joint or spine injections altogether.

Request an appointment at: patients.scnm.edu or call 480-970-0000
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4. Will you be receiving the correct type of stem cells for your issue? For musculoskeletal issues, patients benefit most from treatment with Mesenchymal Stem Cells (MSCs). There are only four sources of MSC. Three are obtained from your body and are called autologous adult mesenchymal stem cells. The fourth source of these cells are derived from healthy live birth post natal umbilical cords or amniotic membranes that undergo extensive testing to insure safety. As important as this testing sounds, not all umbilical cord stem cells are as rigorously tested for sterility and the absence of viral or bacterial contamination. They should also be assayed for cell count and cell viability.

Some doctors use cord blood products containing a different type of stem cell, known as a Hematopoetic Stem Cells which are predetermined to become bloods cells and vascular elements thus providing no direct stimulation of joint cartilage and other tissues.

5. What kind of imaging is used to assure proper placement? To be effective, stem cells – that are free of contaminants, and viable – must be injected precisely into the exact location determined previously to be the source of pain or disability. To ensure accuracy of the stem cell placement, the doctor should use an imaging device, either ultrasound or a fluoroscope. Fluoroscopy uses traceable contrast and live x-rays (it's like a video x-ray), that allows the physician to visualize and distinguish complex structures like the spine, neck or shoulder. Ultrasound can help to show the physician the exact location where a tear in a ligament or tendon exists. With either method, the physician can watch in real time as the cells are injected in the exact spot that they are needed. Make sure that the facility has the equipment to safely, effectively and precisely perform the treatment.