

**Treatment options for your back pain or neck pain**

There are three major treatment options for spine patients who suffer back / neck pain with or without radiating symptoms.

- I. **“Do nothing” option:** This is not recommended. Often this can lead to chronic pain condition which is very hard to treat.
  
- II. **Conservative, Non-surgical option:** The conservative spinal treatment encompasses three phases: **(1. Anti-inflammatory phase. 2. Rehabilitation phase. 3. Maintenance phase.)** This is a healthier and more natural way to allow your spine to heal.
  1. **Anti-inflammatory phase** is pharmaceutical management, often temporary. The goal of this initial phase is to break the pain cycle via anti-inflammatory medications (“Putting out the fire”). The medications choices include topical, oral, or injection. The injection is the quickest and the most direct way to deliver anti-inflammatory medication to the injury site, spine or soft tissue.
  2. **Rehabilitation phase** can be introduced after inflammatory process is reduced or resolved. The spinal exercise program will be individually designed by Dr. Chen and spinal rehabilitation will be instructed by leading spine physical therapists.
  3. **Maintenance / Preventive care phase** will require your life style change, work ergonomic modification, diet and exercise adaptation. All with or without further pharmaceutical support.

It is essential for you to complete all three phases of treatment to achieve the maximum benefit of conservative care. The goal of conservative spine intervention is not to give you a new spine, but to help you preserve your current spinal condition and to achieve a very functional life style, to improve quality of life, and to prevent future injury.

Our goal is to ensure that you can be independent from pharmaceutical management. Often, non-pharmaceutical holistic pain management, such as medical acupuncture / cupping can be served as a powerful adjunct pain control option, which should be considered at all phases of the conservative spine care. This thousand-year proven method can provide benefit of general relaxation, further inflammatory reduction, and pain relief. In addition to the above three-phase treatment, regenerative medicine may also be considered for your condition.

4. **BOTOX anti-spasm injection (optional):** Botox isn't just for celebrities anymore — patients with chronic back and neck pain may want to consider using it. The same injection that works to smooth out wrinkles just may work to relieve persistent, life-inhibiting pain caused by muscle tension and spasm. **In fact, Botox was originally approved by the FDA in 1989 to treat severe muscle contractions caused by cervical dystonia. So before Botox was the new "it" anti-aging treatment, doctors knew it could relax muscles. Botox does that by blocking the neurotransmitters that tell muscles to contract. No signal from the neurotransmitters, no muscle spasm, no tension — no pain.**

5. **Regenerative medicine (optional):**

- A. **How does platelet rich plasma therapy work?**

The San Mateo Spine Center offers a regenerative therapy that promotes healing at the cellular level, known as platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy. In these procedures, the cells are injected directly to the site of the injury. Platelet cells specialize into the kind of cells needed for repair, helping to not only reduce the pain but also repair the damaged tissue and rejuvenate the degenerative area.

- B. **Am I a candidate for platelet rich plasma therapy?**

Regenerative medicine is often recommended for patients who have joint, ligament, or muscle damage but who may not want to undergo surgery, or may not be a good candidate for surgery. In some cases, these therapies are used along with surgery to help encourage healing. Regenerative therapies have been shown to be particularly effective in repairing shoulder, knee, and hip injuries. They are also used for sports injuries (chronic or acute), accident injuries (acute), and spinal degenerative conditions, such as failed back surgeries, degenerative facets, discs, and bulging or herniated discs.

The majority of our spine patients report a positive response with the conservative option. Our goal is to improve your pain in a natural, healthy route. Dr. Chen is one of the leading experts in conservative spine management. **He served on the Stanford faculty, and was the Founder and Medical Director of Interventional Spine Center at Stanford University Medical Center.**

**III. Surgical option:** This is usually indicated when you lose bowel or bladder control, develop permanent neurological damage, or have intractable pain. This option includes discectomy, laminectomy, fusions with rods, screws, and plates, or artificial discs depending on your spinal pathological conditions. Spine surgery requires general anesthesia. Post-surgically, you may require additional pain management and rehabilitation. Depending on the extent of the surgery, it may take a few months or few years to recover. Dr. Chen often co-manages your spinal condition with surgeons. He knows all the qualified spinal surgeons in the Bay area, including neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons that he can refer you to.

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## **Regenerative Medicine Using PRP Injections**

### **1. What is regenerative medicine?**

Regenerative medicine is a form of treatment that uses the body's natural cells and mechanics to heal damaged or painful muscles, tissues, ligaments, and joints. This unique treatment modality is performed in an outpatient setting with your own blood.

Regenerative therapy reduces inflammation and provides rejuvenation by using your own concentrated regenerative properties (cells, platelets, plasma, etc.) from the body. Regenerative medicine utilizes stem cell therapy or platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections to help patients find relief from their chronic musculoskeletal pain, arthritis, ligament and muscle tears, or tissue inflammation.

### **2. Am I a candidate for PRP injections?**

PRP injections are typically recommended for patients with arthritis and other degenerative conditions including, but not limited to:

- Soft tissue injuries such as muscle, ligament, tendon sprains and strains
- Shoulder, knee, hip, wrist, ankle, hand injuries
- Back and neck injuries
- Arthritis

### **3. What are PRP injections?**

When a patient sustains an injury or develops a condition that causes tissue degeneration, the body reacts by sending platelets to the damaged areas to help promote healing. Although effective, there are instances where the body's natural response to injury or damage is not enough, which may lead to inadequate healing or chronic pain. PRP injections improve the body's natural processes by sending additional platelets and other regenerative properties to damaged areas.

### **4. How do PRP injections work?**

To acquire the platelets and plasma, physicians must draw a patient's blood and place it into a centrifuge so that the blood's contents can be separated. Once this has occurred, a physician will combine the platelets and plasma, making a unique, powerful solution, and inject it into damaged tissues, muscles, and ligaments. These concentrated plasma cells will help the body heal surrounding tissues and promote regeneration.