

PATIENT DECISION GUIDE

7 Questions to Ask Before Choosing a Non-Surgical Arthritis Treatment

The best choice is not simply the newest treatment or the one with the strongest marketing. It is the option that fits your diagnosis, health, goals, evidence, and preferences.

USE THIS GUIDE Bring these questions to your appointment and write down the answers. A good decision should still make sense after the pressure of the visit is gone.

Start with the right questions

- 1 What is the diagnosis - and how certain are we?**
Why it matters: Arthritis on an X-ray does not prove it is the only source of pain. Tendon, bursa, spine, nerve, meniscus, crystal disease, and inflammatory arthritis can change the plan.
Ask: *What findings connect my symptoms, examination, and imaging to this diagnosis?*
- 2 What specific problem is this treatment meant to improve?**
Why it matters: Treatments may target pain, inflammation, strength, stability, or function. No single option reliably accomplishes all of these.
Ask: *What measurable goal are we treating - and how will we know if it worked?*
- 3 What is the evidence for someone like me?**
Why it matters: A treatment may perform differently by joint, arthritis severity, age, alignment, weight, or prior treatment. Testimonials cannot show the average chance of benefit.
Ask: *What do high-quality studies and current guidelines say for my joint and stage of arthritis?*
- 4 Exactly what treatment or product will I receive?**
Why it matters: The label alone may be incomplete. Dose, formulation, preparation, number of sessions, image guidance, and rehabilitation can vary - especially for injections and biologic products.
Ask: *What is the exact product, dose, protocol, guidance method, and follow-up plan?*

Compare the complete plan - not just the procedure

- **Foundation:** education, exercise or physical therapy, strength, activity modification, sleep, and weight or load management when relevant.
- **Symptom control:** topical or oral medication, bracing, cane, steroid injection, or other selected options based on benefits and risks.
- **Procedural options:** gel injection, PRP, nerve procedures, or other interventions only after clarifying the evidence, product, technique, cost, and expected outcome.
- **Escalation:** a surgical opinion can be informative even if you are not ready for surgery; it does not commit you to an operation.

Questions 5-7: benefits, safety, and the full plan

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What benefit is realistic - and how long might it last?

Why it matters: Ask for the range of outcomes, not a guarantee. A meaningful result should improve an activity that matters to you, not only a pain score.

Ask: *Out of 100 similar patients, how many improve, by how much, and for approximately how long?*

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What are the risks, limitations, and recovery requirements?

Why it matters: Risk depends on your medical conditions, medications, allergies, infection risk, diabetes, upcoming surgery, and the procedure itself. Inaction also has tradeoffs.

Ask: *What could go wrong, how often, what should I do afterward, and what symptoms require urgent care?*

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What will this cost - and what is Plan B?

Why it matters: Know the full financial and time commitment before treatment. A clear exit strategy prevents an open-ended cycle of procedures that are not meeting your goals.

Ask: *What is included, what is not covered, when will we reassess, and what are the alternatives if I do not improve?*

Be cautious when you hear

- “Guaranteed,” “permanent,” “risk-free,” or “works for everyone.”
- Claims that cartilage, bone, or an entire joint will be regenerated without clear human evidence.
- A vague “stem cell,” exosome, amniotic, or birth-tissue product without its exact identity and regulatory status.
- Pressure to pay immediately, buy a package, or skip an independent medical evaluation.
- Only testimonials, celebrity endorsements, or before-and-after stories instead of comparative evidence.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION PRP made from your own blood is different from marketed stem-cell, exosome, umbilical-cord, amniotic, or other cell/tissue products. Ask about each product separately; do not assume the evidence or regulatory status is the same.

Your decision notes

My diagnosis and main goal: _____

Treatment being considered: _____

Expected benefit and review date: _____

Total cost and alternative: _____

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Sources

- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. Management of Osteoarthritis of the Knee (Non-Arthroplasty), 3rd ed. 2021. <https://www.aaos.org/oak3cpg>
- American College of Rheumatology/Arthritis Foundation. 2019 Guideline for Management of Osteoarthritis of the Hand, Hip, and Knee. <https://rheumatology.org/osteoarthritis-guideline>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Important Patient and Consumer Information About Regenerative Medicine Therapies. <https://www.fda.gov/regenerative-medicine-consumer-information>

This guide is for general education and does not replace medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Recommendations can change as evidence evolves. No treatment works for every patient, and individual risks, benefits, costs, and insurance coverage vary.