



## Stem cell therapies for osteoarthritis

### Position Statement

#### Key messages

- Stem cell therapies offer great promise as a potential treatment strategy for a range of conditions, including osteoarthritis.
- However, research is still in its early stages and so far there is not enough high quality evidence to know whether these therapies are safe and effective for osteoarthritis.
- Clinically unproven stem cell therapies may pose serious risks to your health. These risks include infection, ectopic tissue formation (growth of body tissues in the wrong place) and allergies.
- Some clinics in Australia and overseas are marketing unproven stem cell therapies for osteoarthritis directly to consumers. Changes will soon be introduced to improve regulatory oversight of these therapies and to prohibit advertising of unproven stem cell therapies directly to consumers in Australia.<sup>1</sup>
- Ongoing, high-quality research through properly regulated clinical trials is required to determine what role, if any, stem cell therapies may play in the treatment of osteoarthritis.

#### Background

Osteoarthritis is a leading cause of pain and disability in the Australian population. It affects two million people and costs the health system at least \$2 billion a year. With an ageing and increasingly obese population, the prevalence of osteoarthritis is expected to increase to 5.5 million people by 2030.

Currently, there are no disease-modifying therapies with a credible evidence base for osteoarthritis. Hence there is a pressing need for quality research into potential new treatments for the condition.

Autologous stem cell therapies offer promise as a potential treatment for osteoarthritis. These therapies for osteoarthritis usually involve the collection of a patient's own fat cells which are then purified, stimulated and re-injected into an osteoarthritic joint.

However, at present there is not enough evidence to support the use of these stem cell therapies for osteoarthritis. Current research is still in its early stages and understanding of how effective and safe these therapies are is limited. Further research, through properly conducted randomised controlled clinical trials, is essential to determine the therapeutic role of stem cell treatments for osteoarthritis.

Some clinics in Australia are marketing these unproven autologous fat-derived stem cell therapies for osteoarthritis directly to consumers, despite the lack of sufficient evidence of benefit and safety. These treatments are often provided at provided at substantial financial costs

to consumers, including treatment and follow-up costs, as well as the potential cost of emergency medical care in the event of medical complications.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration, which is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods in Australia, will soon be introducing changes to increase regulatory oversight of stem cell therapies and prohibit advertising of unproven stem cell therapies directly to consumers.<sup>i</sup> Arthritis Australia strongly supports these changes.

### **More information**

[Australian Rheumatology Association Position Statement on Stem Cell Therapies](#)

[Therapeutic Goods Administration. Consumer guide to stem cell treatments and regulation.](#)

[Stem Cells Australia](#)

[International Society for Stem Cell Research](#)

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/regulation-autologous-cell-and-tissue-products>