

Sugar Fix for Torn Ligaments:

Doctor prescribes injections of glucose and herbs to get yogis back on the mat

By Fernando Pagés Ruiz

The Hippocratic Oath requires doctors to "do no harm." But sometimes the road to healing takes an unlikely detour. For example, Hippocrates treated back pain by lancing hot pins into the vertebrae of patients. It sounds barbaric, but it worked. The new injury helped heal the old one.

When yoga teacher Richard Freeman sprained his sacroiliac joint, he turned to an orthopedic treatment called prolotherapy, based on the same principles Hippocrates used. "Prolotherapy works like certain types of acupuncture," explains Dr. Allen Thomashefsky (<http://www.drtom.net/>), the orthopedist and Ashtanga Yoga student who treated Freeman, "applying injections of herbs and dextrose, or sugar, to microscopically re-injure ligaments and stimulate a new healing cycle."

Unlike muscle and bone, ligaments heal very slowly. Since the body's reconstructive processes stop a few weeks after an injury, even a moderate sprain can leave you with ligaments that never get a chance to heal completely. Then, like a door with loose hinges, these damaged ligaments allow your bones to swing out of alignment in the joint, leading to cramped muscles, inflammation, pain, and eventually arthritis. To jump-start the healing process, Thomashefsky uses a mildly irritating solution of dextrose he calls "sweet shots" injected directly into the stretched or torn connective tissue. Over several weeks the body reacts by sending "fibroblasts"—connective tissue builders—to the area. These biological repairmen lay down new, fibrous cells wherever they detect damage. The new cells strengthen the joint capsule and restore stability. The repaired tissue can be up to 40 percent stronger.

Research published in the *Journal of Spinal Disorder* in 1993 shows prolotherapy leads to substantial improvement in over 80 percent of patients. Even the conservative Dr. C. Everett Koop, former United States Surgeon General, calls himself a true "believer." Koop turned to prolotherapy after two neurological clinics diagnosed him with incurable back pain. Prolotherapy proved them wrong. And because yoga students generally lead healthy lives, they enjoy an excellent rate of recovery.

Prolotherapy costs \$150 to \$300 a session, and many private insurance policies cover the treatment.

