

## **Brought to their knees: New routes for relief ; Injections 'a miracle' for longtime jock; [Chicago Final Edition]**

*Devin Rose, Tribune staff reporter. Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Jan 16, 2005. pg. 6*

### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

Hyalgan, which goes by the generic name hyaluronan, was approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in knees in the late 1990s. "It initially works as a lubricant and shock absorber," said Dr. Thomas Werbie, [Ric Schmidt]'s doctor. "The long-term effect is that it seems to enhance the function of the remaining cartilage cells that have not been damaged. . . . Studies indicate that it can prevent progression of arthritis in the knees."

### **Full Text** (608 words)

*(Copyright 2005 by the Chicago Tribune)*

QUALITIES OF LIFE. HEALTH.

Ric Schmidt had been a jock in high school and college. In later years, he kept himself busy on weekends running 10Ks and half-marathons, even though during his days throwing the hammer in college, he had worn away the cartilage in his right knee so that bone was rubbing on bone.

When he reached his mid-40s and had trouble walking without a limp, he was "frustrated and embarrassed--I had the self-image of a jock." But he wasn't one to give up--in fact, he was determined to take up mountain climbing.

Thanks to a substance called Hyalgan, he's a happy weekend warrior again. Not only that, but he also has climbed some of the world's major summits--he's heading to Mt. Everest in April 2006.

"I tried glucosamine and anti-inflammatories for my osteoarthritis," said Schmidt, 54, who is president of United Hospital System in Kenosha, "and nothing gave me the relief this has."

Hyalgan, which goes by the generic name hyaluronan, was approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in knees in the late 1990s. "It initially works as a lubricant and shock absorber," said Dr. Thomas Werbie, Schmidt's doctor. "The long-term effect is that it seems to enhance the function of the remaining cartilage cells that have not been damaged. . . . Studies indicate that it can prevent progression of arthritis in the knees."

For Schmidt, Werbie said, the substance worked "like a miracle."

"Before trying it, we were looking at a procedure in which we remove a wedge of bone from the tibia to realign the leg," Werbie said. "Instead, we tried Hyalgan, and it worked."

Hyalgan, which is made from rooster comb, "is wonderful because it's a natural product," said Dr. Jeffrey Meisles, an osteoarthritis expert on staff at Elmhurst Hospital. "There really aren't any side effects. If people have an allergy to eggs or feathers, they shouldn't use it, but that's about it."

Hyalgan is injected into the site of the osteoarthritis (the FDA has approved it for use in the knees, but it is often injected, off-label, into other joints, and research is being done on its effectiveness in shoulders and ankles).

Treatment consists of five shots over five weeks, and its effects last about a year (Werbie said some of his patients have had good results for two to three years). It works best on those with

mild to moderate osteoarthritis, Meisles said. But he added that "some people have come in thinking they might need a knee replacement, and they have responded to this therapy. I've had patients on it for years."

An individual injection costs about \$110 for the substance alone, Werbie said. But both doctors said insurance typically covers the treatment.

"It doesn't hurt to have it at all," Schmidt said. "I would equate it to a pinch."

Schmidt's first major mountain climb was the 19,340-foot Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa, within a year after his first treatment, "and it felt great." He has continued his treatments for several years. For those not quite so high minded, he added, "I also can play 18 holes of golf and tennis with no problem."

Werbie added: "He couldn't walk and now he's climbing mountains. That's very satisfying. It's quite possible he could do this for life."

For more information about Hyalgan, go to [www.hyalgan.com](http://www.hyalgan.com). Or check with your doctors about it or other brands of hyaluronan, which require slightly different treatment regimens.

**[Illustration]**

PHOTO; Caption: PHOTO (color): Ric Schmidt, working out at Gold's Gym in Kenosha, had faced surgery until trying a substance made from rooster comb. Photo for the Tribune by Brian Kersey.

---

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.