

Patient Information

CORTICOSTEROID INJECTIONS

Local steroid injections are designed to provide fast and effective relief to areas of acute and chronic inflammation. The effects are usually temporary however this depends on the underlying cause of the condition being treated. Corticosteroids are a prescription medication and as with all medicines side effects can be experienced. The information below provides an important summary for patients.

What are corticosteroids and why are they used?

Corticosteroids occur naturally in the body. The steroid medication used for an injection is man-made. They are not the same as anabolic steroids sometimes used by bodybuilders. Corticosteroid medication can be taken as tablets or through an injection.

Corticosteroids are routinely used to quickly reduce inflammation within the body. Corticosteroid injections are particularly useful for targeting musculoskeletal injuries that have an element of inflammation e.g. tenosynovitis capsulitis or osteoarthritis. The advantage of injecting steroids over taking tablets is the delivery of medication into the exact site of symptoms is more effective at targeting specific inflammation within a joint or tissue.

What happens when I have a local steroid injection?

The clinician performing the injection will fully explain the procedure and check for any contraindications. The most appropriate type and dose of steroid will be prescribed. The medication will then be injected using ultrasound guidance into the specific joint or tissue causing symptoms.

Your clinician will screen you for health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure and may contact your GP for consent if deemed necessary.

What happens after the injection?

All steroid injections are typically administered with a local Anaesthetic. Therefore most peoples pain is relieved within minutes - however this effect is temporary (approximately 30 minutes). The effects of the steroid can take 3-7 days for full effect.

You will be asked to stay in clinic for 20 minutes for monitoring. It is worth considering travel arrangements as the local Anaesthetic can make the joint feel numb.

If you are having an injection into a joint then strenuous activity should be avoided for 2-3 days. If you are having an injection around a tendon then loading the tendon should be avoided for 2 weeks.

Will I need another injection?

Corticosteroid injections should be used sparingly. The practical purpose of a corticosteroid injection is to provide a window of pain relief in order to engage in a long-term rehabilitation based solution. It is possible to repeat a steroid injection up to 3 times in a year. If this is the case it may be worth discussing other injection therapy options with your therapist e.g. hyaluronic acid or PRP.

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Will the injection hurt?

- Using ultrasound guidance minimises discomfort considerably.
- The vast majority of people feedback that the injection was not as bad as anticipated. The injection is similar in feeling to a typical vaccination procedure.

Can I take other medicines along with the steroid injection?

Steroid injections can be used with most medications without issue. However certain medications can interact with corticosteroids, please therefore provide your therapist with a full and accurate list of all your current medications. Possible medication interactions will be checked by your therapist prior to any injection.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Unfortunately steroid injections can not be offered to patients who are pregnant. Breastfeeding carriers the potential risk of passing medication to the baby through breast milk so is recommended avoiding if at all possible.

Possible risks/side effects:

The vast majority of patients will have a steroid injection without any negative side effects. Below is a list of the potential risks:

- 1 in 4 people will notice a temporary increase in their pain within the first 1-2 days. This is termed a post-injection flare. This settles on its own within 48 hours for the vast majority of patients. Rest and over the counter pain killers can help in this case. Having a post-injection flare does not mean the injection has gone wrong or that it will not work it is just the body's reaction to the medication as it reduces inflammation.
- Infection - it is extremely rare but as with any procedure that breaks the skin barrier there is a very small chance of infection. If your injection site becomes hot/red/swollen then seek emergency advice.
- Diabetes - corticosteroids can cause a fluctuation in blood sugar levels. It is therefore advisable to closely monitor blood sugars for 1-2 weeks after the injection.
- Anaphylaxis/Allergic Reaction - as with any medication there is a very small chance of an allergic reaction. If this were to happen it would be within minutes and appropriate emergency measures would be taken.

The following systemic effects of corticosteroids are extremely rare during local steroid injections as the doses used are comparatively low compared to oral steroids:

- Facial flushing
- Temporary menstrual changes
- Weight gain
- Weakening of tissue/tendons (particularly if repeated injections)
- Local subcutaneous fat atrophy (temporary and disappears within a few months)
- Dizziness
- Injury or trauma to neurovascular structures during the injection procedure

If you have any further questions please ask your therapist at the time of appointment or through the below contact details.

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