
Steroid Injections

Steroid injections are also known as cortisone injections, Kenacort injections, and corticosteroid injections. This sheet discusses low-dose injections that can be given up to a few times per year.

Steroid injections are used to treat painful conditions of the joints and soft tissues, such as bursitis, tennis elbow, inflammation caused by arthritis, and some nerve problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Steroid injections provide prolonged relief of inflammatory pain particularly when used with the guidance of your healthcare provider/treatment provider.

Steroid injections are generally very safe and well tolerated. Steroid injections are safe in the second half of pregnancy (after 20 weeks).

How do they work?

Steroid injections work by delivering a powerful anti-inflammatory directly to the painful area. The steroid may take a few days to become effective but may give sustained relief. Usually, only one injection is required, but sometimes several are required over a number of months to relieve the condition.

What will happen?

We will discuss the procedure & outcomes and provide an opportunity to ask questions and your consent will be required. The doctor will clean and scan the affected area prior to performing the injection.

What will you feel?

The needle, which is very small, is carefully guided into the area of inflammation. Local anaesthetic is mixed with the steroid so that the area goes numb after the injection.

After the injection

The local anaesthetic wears off within a few hours and the injected area may be more uncomfortable for 24 to 48 hours. Rest, compresses and paracetamol will help relieve this pain. Your doctor may prescribe some oral pain relief or anti-inflammatory medication to take while waiting for the steroid to take effect. Avoid strenuous activity after the procedure but as a guide, if an activity is not painful before the procedure, it is probably safe to continue with after the procedure.

Patients receiving hand, elbow and foot injections may require a driver to transport them home after the procedure.

If you are not already seeing a physio / osteopath, long term benefit from the injection will be enhanced by a rehabilitation programme commencing a week after the injection.

Although uncommon, you may experience minor reactions to the injection, such as:

- Bruising or bleeding at the site of injection, which is generally minor.
- People with diabetes may get a temporary rise in blood sugar levels and need to monitor their blood sugar levels closely over the next few days.
- Superficial injections may rarely result in thinning or pallor of the skin or local fat loss. This is not painful and mostly returns to normal after a few months.
- The injection can cause hot flushes, which can last for up to a day or two.

More serious problems

These are all very unlikely but do occur occasionally. If you have any concerns about a possible adverse reaction to the injection, please discuss with your treatment provider.

Infection

Infection is very uncommon but may present as pain, heat, redness & swelling. If you feel unwell, you should see your GP immediately.

Cartilage and tendon damage

Frequent injections into weight bearing joints can cause cartilage damage. Injections are rarely put into large tendons, such as the Achilles tendon, in view of concerns that the medication may weaken the tendon.

Effects on the rest of the body

The steroids from the injection are absorbed over time and are a low dose compared with those taken as pills for medical problems and side effects are highly unlikely with single or even a few injections.

CARE FOLLOWING YOUR INJECTION

The injection you have just received normally goes without incident. The injection area may be sore, throb or be slightly swollen for one to two days. It is very important that you rest the area of the injection for 24 to 48 hours after the injection. Applying ice to the area (10 to 15 minutes every one to two hours) for the first day or two will help reduce the pain. In addition, you may benefit from taking paracetamol or Ibuprofen.

Usually a numbing medication is given with the injection, which can last for five to 12 hours. The actual Cortisone may take up to two to five days to take effect. If you develop any abnormal symptoms, such as itching, swelling, redness, rash, or shortness of breath, please call your GP. Normally, these are temporary symptoms which resolve within a day.

The duration of pain relief from these injections varies widely between patients. Some report two or more months of relief while other patients report only a few weeks of relief. For further advice on your ongoing pain management, please consult your Specialist or General Practitioner.

Other do's and don'ts after an injection

Do keep taking all usual medications unless told otherwise by your doctor.

Do get immunised as usual.

You do not need to alter your alcohol intake – up or down

**If you have any concerns following your injection, please contact your GP,
or AFTERHOURS at WhiteCross Accident and Emergency Clinic 09 470 1083**