

Orthopaedics

Steroid Injection: Foot and ankle

What is a foot and ankle injection?

Your foot and ankle contain many bones and joints. Ligaments (flexible fibrous tissue) connect the bones and hold your joints together. For many reasons, foot and ankle joints and surrounding structures can wear out, become injured or inflamed (swollen), which can cause you pain.

Foot and ankle joints injections are usually administered under local anaesthetic which means that you will be awake and the area around the injection site will be made numb with local anaesthetic.

Local anaesthetic will stop the nerves in a part of your body from sending pain signals to your brain. You won't be able to feel any pain after having the local anaesthetic. However, you may still feel some movement and pressure during your foot and ankle injection, and it can sometimes be a little bit uncomfortable.

The actual medicine which gives the treatment in the injection is a corticosteroid which is commonly known as a 'steroid'. Corticosteroids are anti-inflammatory medications used to treat a range of conditions. This medicine will help to reduce swelling and inflammation in the injected area.

The local anaesthetic injection gives immediate pain relief, while the slower acting steroids injected may take 48 hours to 2 weeks to have an effect. This is valuable information to remember when considering the benefits of a foot or ankle injection.

What are the benefits of a foot or ankle injection?

Foot and ankle injections are carried out for **diagnostic** or **therapeutic** purposes.

Diagnostic purpose: Injections can help your surgeon to plan the long-term management of your condition. Injections are particularly useful when the source of your pain is not clear, and they can also assist the surgeon in confirming which structure in your foot or ankle is causing pain.

Therapeutic purpose: The aim is to improve your symptoms by using the local anaesthetic and steroids. The aim of a successful foot or ankle injection is to ease your pain for a period of time.



Patient Information

We will provide you with a pain diary to record your pain before and after the procedure. The pain diary helps your doctor to assess your pain and the effectiveness of the injection. The pain diary instructions will be explained to you after the injection as you will need to record your response to the injection over a period of weeks and bring the diary to your next clinic appointment if you have one.

What are the risks associated with the foot and ankle injection?

- **Increased pain in the injected area, known as Steroid 'Flare':** This is usually temporary and could last up to 48 hours. It is an aggravation of the inflammation that the injection was meant to treat. A cold compress and rest can usually relieve this pain, and over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can help.
If you experience severe pain beyond 48 hours, please contact the GP, Consultant's secretary or attend the local emergency department as it could be a sign of infection, particularly if you feel unwell.
- **Bleeding:** The injected area may bruise or bleed after the treatment. If you are on blood thinning medication such as aspirin or warfarin, the risk of increased bleeding is higher. This can increase your pain after the injection. If you are on warfarin, your INR may be checked prior to the procedure, and you will be given instructions regarding this.
- **Local skin and fat changes:** There may be skin discolouration (usually a lightening effect) or thinning of fat. This can leave a small pale area or a cosmetic scar.
- **Risk of the tendon or fascial rupture:** This is less common. An injection around the tendons or fascia has a risk of weakening it and possible rupture.
- **Allergic reaction to the injection:** This is very rare. Usually, this reaction happens immediately after the injection and can be treated while you are still in the hospital. If you experience any allergic reaction signs after you have been discharged from the hospital, please seek medical advice urgently from your local emergency department.
- **Infection:** This complication is rare. The injected area may become infected and may need antibiotics or possible surgical drainage. The signs of the infected area may include increased pain, swelling, redness, weeping and pus coming from the injected area.

Are there any side effects associated with injection of steroids into the foot and ankle?

Although the injection is directed locally into a joint, you may experience an effect from the steroid that is felt throughout the body. These may include hot flushes, feeling sick, mild abdominal pain, fluid retention, a temporary rise in blood sugar and menstrual irregularities. Usually, this settles within a few days. Please seek medical advice if the side effects don't settle within 48 hours from the time of injection.

Patient Information

Diabetes: If you are a diabetic and your blood glucose level is not well controlled, please let the person performing the injection know.

All diabetics will be advised to check their blood glucose level more frequently in the 24-48 hours after the injection, as steroids can affect blood glucose levels. Please report any concerns to your GP or out-of-hours service.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this Information in another language or format, please contact 02476 965080, and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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