

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. Tendons are non-elastic tubular structures enclosed within a sheath and attached to the bones. The function of the tendon is to move the joints. For many reasons, foot and ankle joints and surrounding structures can wear out or become injured or inflamed which may cause you pain. An injection is generally offered for therapeutic or diagnostic reasons.

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.

A 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. The anti-inflammatory effect of steroids wears off in around 8 weeks. This is valuable information to remember when considering the



Patient Information

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.

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 7 days. It is an aggravation of the inflammation that the injection is 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 do not have any contra-indications to this medicine.

However 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.

Patient Information

- **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 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. The result may prevent your procedure from taking place and you will be given instructions regarding this.
- **Local skin and fat changes:** There may be skin discolouration (usually a lightening effect). This can leave a small pale area or a cosmetic scar. There may also be thinning of fat around the injected area. Skin discolouration may be more noticeable in some people.
- **Risk of the tendon or fascial rupture:** An injection around the tendons or fascia has a risk of weakening it and possible rupture, but this is rare.
- **Allergic reaction to the injection:** This is very rare. Usually, this reaction happens immediately after the injection and will 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:** 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. This is a rare complication.

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

Although the injection is directed locally into a joint, it is possible that you may experience effects from the steroid that is can be 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, these effects settle quickly but please seek medical advice if they do not settle within 48 hours from the time of injection.

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

Patient Information

blood glucose levels. Please report any concerns to your GP or out-of-hours service.

Coronavirus/COVID 19: There is a theoretical risk that a steroid injection can lower the immune response which is required to combat infection. Therefore theoretically it is possible that having the injection could increase the likelihood of contracting the COVID 19 virus and the symptoms being serious if you do. However, so far there is no evidential data to support this. If you are concerned about this please contact your consultant's secretary and he/she will be able to put you in contact with one of the foot and ankle team to discuss your concerns.

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

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

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