

Orthopaedics

Steroid Injection

Steroid injections have an anti-inflammatory effect and are given to help reduce pain and swelling, and to help you move a joint more easily. Many people have steroids injected into their joints, for example, shoulders, knees, elbows or hands. Steroids can also be injected into soft tissues to treat conditions such as tennis elbow and trigger finger.

The steroids used for injections are similar to those produced naturally by the body. Pain relief following a steroid injection can last for a few days to many months. However, the injections should not be repeated more than three times a year for each area.

What happens during the procedure?

Joint injections are usually performed as an out-patient or day-case procedure, you will be awake during the procedure.

Before your injection, your clinician will examine the area. Your skin will be cleaned with a sterile wipe or solution. You may also be given a local anaesthetic to numb the skin before the steroid is injected, or your doctor may inject a local anaesthetic at the same time as the steroid mixed in the syringe. This local anaesthetic may provide immediate short-term pain relief.

If you have too much fluid in your joint making it feel tight and uncomfortable, your clinician may draw the fluid out with a syringe before injecting the joint. This is known as joint aspiration.

For certain joints your clinician may also use X-rays or an ultrasound scanner during the procedure. This helps them to direct the injection to the right spot.

For this procedure please also refer to the Radiology Department Leaflet: 'Joint Injection Information'.



What happens afterwards?

If you have a local anaesthetic injected with the steroid, you may not have any pain for the first few hours. However, when the local anaesthetic wears off, your pain may return as the steroid can take several weeks to work. It is advisable that you stay within the hospital for 30 minutes after the injection to make sure you don't have any immediate side-effects.

You may need to arrange for someone to drive you home

Try to completely rest the joint for 24 to 48 hours to allow the steroid to take effect. If you are unable to completely rest the area injected, try to keep movements to a minimum and avoid strenuous activity. If you are having physiotherapy, your physiotherapist may encourage you to move the joint while it isn't painful.

It is possible that you might have a 'flare reaction' following an injection which may cause an increase in your pain for a few days.

Contact the hospital immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms soon after your joint injection:

- A high temperature
- Increased redness or swelling around the joint
- Wheezing or a tight chest
- An increase in the amount of pain you have in the joint

What are the risks following an injection?

Joint injections are commonly performed and are generally safe. However, in order to make an informed decision and give your consent, you need to be aware of the possible side-effects and the risk of complications of this procedure.

Side-effects

These are the unwanted but mostly temporary effects of a successful joint injection.

You may feel more pain and tenderness than usual in the injected area for a day or two. You can use ice to treat this (although you should not apply ice directly to your skin; use a damp cloth between the ice and the skin and

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do not leave it in place more than 15 minutes). Alternatively, take pain killers that you know are safe for you.

Steroids can cause temporary facial flushing.

Complications

Specific complications are rare and most people are not affected.

It is possible to have an unexpected reaction to the anaesthetic or bleeding during or very soon after a joint injection. It is also possible to have thinning of the skin around the injection site.

If you are diabetic it is advisable to monitor your blood sugar levels carefully as a steroid injection can alter these levels.

There is also a small risk that injecting a joint can cause an infection. The risk of infection may increase depending on your general health. If an infection occurs it may need treatment with antibiotics. If you develop pain and heat in the area that has been injected and especially if you feel unwell you should see your doctor immediately.

How long do steroid injections take to work?

If a local anaesthetic has been given, pain relief should occur within a few minutes but this will wear off quickly. Longer acting steroids take several days and up to a few weeks to become effective.

In the event of you experiencing any problems please contact your GP or the Day Surgery Unit.

For further information on your procedure please contact The Day Surgery Unit on 024 7696 6861 or 024 7696 6868

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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