Chemical sympathectomy injection

Introduction
This leaflet provides information about a procedure called a chemical sympathectomy, its possible benefits and side effects, as well as what you should do afterwards.

What is a chemical sympathectomy?
A chemical sympathectomy is an injection on to the sympathetic nerves which run down the front of the spine, close to, but outside the spinal column.

Why am I having injections?
This particular group of nerves, called the sympathetic nerves, can sometimes give rise to pain in the limbs, and often other sensations (such as feeling cold, clammy and changes in colour) can also occur. These nerves also control the blood supply to the limbs.

What is injected?
These nerves can be permanently numbed, by injecting a drug called Phenol directly on to them.

Where is it done?
Most of the procedures are carried out in the Chedworth Suite at Cheltenham General Hospital. A small number of Dr Kafafy’s patients will be asked to attend the Day Unit at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. A letter with details of your appointment and instructions will be sent to you by the pain clinic.

How is it done?
• You will be asked to wear a gown
• A small needle called a cannula may be put into the back of your hand
• You will be asked to lie on your stomach on the X-ray table
• The area is cleaned with antiseptic
• X-ray pictures are taken throughout the procedure to direct the needle on to the nerve
• The consultant will numb the area with local anaesthetic before putting the injection onto the nerve
• Sedation is not normally used for this procedure, but if you feel very anxious then you can discuss it with the consultant prior to the injection being given.

How long will I be in hospital?
Although the procedure itself takes 10 to 15 minutes, you will be given a time to come in for either a morning or afternoon procedure. Due to the way the theatre lists are organised, you may have a substantial wait before your injections are done, so please come prepared for this. After the procedure, you will be offered a drink and a biscuit and allowed home shortly afterwards.

Can I take my usual tablets?
Take your usual tablets in the morning and bring them with you. Patients with diabetes and those taking blood thinning medicines (such as warfarin or clopidogrel) will be given individual information. If this applies to you please contact the pain clinic nurses on Tel: 0300 422 2976.

Can I eat and drink?
Please do not have any food 6 hours prior to your appointment time. You may have clear fluids up to 2 hours before your appointment.

For example: If you have a morning appointment at 8:30am, do not have any food, sweets or chewing gum after 2:30am. Drink clear fluids, water, black tea or coffee up until 6:30am.

Nothing to eat or drink after 6:30am.

If you have an afternoon appointment at 1:00pm, do not have any food, sweets or chewing gum after 7:00am. Drink clear fluids, water, black tea or coffee up until 11:00am. Nothing to eat or drink after 11:00am.

Can I drive home?
For safety reasons you are asked not to drive on the day of the procedure or the following day.
Risks

- Local bruising may occur and this settles in a couple of days
- It is normal to have some discomfort at the entry site of the injection for a couple of days
- However if the pain is severe or you feel unwell you should contact your GP
- Occasionally patients may experience pain in the groin after the procedure. In rare cases this pain may remain permanently. It is unclear why this happens and it generally settles in a few days
- Unfortunately, no injection is without risk. In a very small number of patients, there is a risk of damage to tissues in the area of the injection and, very rarely, a permanent increase in pain.

Will it work?

Chemical sympathectomy can be very effective but does not work for everyone.

What happens next?

About 6 weeks after your procedure you will either be asked to telephone our clinical nurse specialists to give a progress report, or your pain consultant will give you a form to post back to us. Either way, the next step in your treatment will be decided according to the amount of benefit you have had from the injections and any further appointments will be sent to you in the post. If you are free from pain, you may not be routinely followed up, but may be left with a 6 month open appointment instead.

Contact information

Pain Clinic
Tel: 0300 422 2976
Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 9:00am to 12:00pm
Tuesday, 1:30pm to 4:00pm

An answering machine will be in operation at all other times.

For urgent calls please contact your GP or NHS 111.

**NHS 111**
Tel: 111

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