

A patient's guide to soft tissue and joint injections

Introduction

This leaflet will help you understand why you may be offered an injection into a joint or the soft tissue surrounding a joint. You will learn what to expect when the injection is given and it will answer some commonly asked questions, in addition to the information given to you by your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist.

Why do I need an injection?

Your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist may suggest an injection as part of the care of your condition. Corticosteroid injections are often used to help joint pain and swelling that has not responded to simple anti-inflammatory medication, or for treating tendon problems that are painful or clicking.

What is injected?

A corticosteroid is a drug that helps to reduce inflammation and pain within the joint or soft tissue. There are a number of different corticosteroids and your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist will choose which is most appropriate for your condition. The corticosteroid is often mixed with a local anaesthetic to further reduce pain associated with your condition. An injected corticosteroid acts mainly in the area injected and does not have the same effects as taking oral steroids.

What are the risks of having an injection?

You will not be offered an injection if you have any signs of infection or feel unwell, or plan to have surgery or dentistry work within the next 3 weeks. You should also not have an injection if you have a known allergy to either the corticosteroid or local anaesthetic.

It is important to inform the doctor, nurse or physiotherapist if you know you have had previous reactions with either a local anaesthetic or a corticosteroid.

Diabetic patients may find that their blood sugar levels need closer monitoring over the few days following an injection.

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Women, who are pregnant, should inform the doctor, nurse or physiotherapist before an injection as in some circumstances this may not be the best treatment. In these cases, other treatment options will be discussed with you.

Occasionally, post-menopausal bleeding occurs after the injection.

In some cases, the area of skin around the injection site will appear discoloured and dimpled after the injection; this is usually permanent. If you are concerned, please discuss this with your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist.

As an injection involves a needle piercing the skin, there is a very small risk of infection associated with a corticosteroid injection. Therefore, you should look for the following signs around the injection site:

- Heat
- Swelling
- Excessive tenderness
- Redness

If this occurs or you feel unwell as a result of the injection, then please contact your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist or, if out of hours, contact your local Emergency Department.

Severe reaction such as an anaphylactic reaction is very rare. Signs of this may include:

- Flushing of the face and neck
- Difficulty swallowing or feeling a lump in the throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Itchy skin
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Feeling faint

If you have any of the above symptoms, you should seek medical help immediately by attending your local Emergency Department.

How is it done?

If you consent to the injection, you will be asked to sit or lie down on a couch or chair. The area to be injected will then be cleaned with antiseptic. The doctor, nurse or physiotherapist will check the medication and dose to be injected and draw up the corticosteroid and local anaesthetic into the syringe. This may be performed by a clinic nurse.

The doctor, nurse or physiotherapist will then inject the joint or soft tissue as appropriate. Some patients experience discomfort but others report they do not feel anything. A plaster is then placed over the injection site to keep it clean. This can be removed the following day.

What can I expect afterwards?

The procedure takes a few minutes, and the effects of the injection are varied.

The local anaesthetic, if used, works within a few minutes and you may feel some numbness, which will only last for a few hours. Some patients report an increase in pain after their injection. This is usually very short lived and resolves within a few days. This is due to the local anaesthetic wearing off and the corticosteroid starting to work and is entirely normal. If this occurs, then taking simple pain relief can help. You can expect the injection to start working over the next few days and continue to work for a few months. The effects may not last forever. Some patients report a good effect up to 6 months after the injection, whilst others feel their symptoms return after a few weeks. It varies for each individual and the condition for which the injection has been given.

Will I be able to drive home afterwards?

Some doctors and nurses may recommend avoiding driving for 24 to 48 hours following an injection in your knee or ankle. In other cases, as long as you feel safe to do so, there is no reason why you cannot drive home afterwards.

Can I eat and drink?

Yes, there are no restrictions on what you can eat or drink, either before or after the injection.

Can I take my usual tablets?

Yes, take your usual medication as prescribed.

What do I need to do after having the injection?

Some doctors, nurses and physiotherapists like you to rest the area after an injection, but others do not have a preference. You will be advised about what is most appropriate for you. The advice may include suggesting exercises, which will be fully explained to you. In order to gain the best effect from the injection, please follow the instructions you are given.

What happens next?

The doctor, nurse or physiotherapist may need to see you in clinic, or make contact with you by telephone to review the effects of the injection. An appointment will be made for you if required.

Who can I contact?

If you have any further queries about corticosteroid injections please contact your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist.

Name:

Contact telephone number:

Further information is available at the following locations:

Physiotherapy Department

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3040

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8527

Orthopaedic Outpatient Department

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3147

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8408

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