Subcutaneous Injection

Rheumatology

Patient Information

Other formats If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact myhealth.devon@nhs.net

Corticosteroid / Local Anaesthetic injections

What is a corticosteroid injection?

A corticosteroid (or 'cortisone') is an anti-inflammatory medicine, which can be injected directly into the tissues that are causing your symptoms. It is an alternative to taking anti- inflammatory medication by mouth. It acts directly in the area injected and is not the same as the steroids taken by bodybuilders or prohibited in athletes.

What are the benefits – why should I have a corticosteroid injection?

The injection can help to relieve swelling, pain and stiffness caused by inflammation. This may in turn help you to start your rehabilitation and return to normal activities sooner by 'breaking the cycle' of pain and inflammation.

It can also be helpful to aid in the diagnosis of your condition if it is not clear which structures are responsible for your pain. You may also have a local anaesthetic injected at the same time, which may provide temporary pain relief.

What are the risks?

The possible side effects of the injection include:

- An increase in pain or 'flare' reaction in the immediate 48 hours.
- A red face or facial flushing for a few days
- A small area of fat loss or change in skin colour at the injection site (depigmentation).

Adapted from "Corticosteroid/local anaesthetic injections" - Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust

- Temporary bruising or bleeding. The effect may be increased if you are taking blood thinning tablets such as Warfarin / Clopidogrel or Aspirin. Please inform the practitioner if you are taking any such tablets.
- Diabetic patients may notice a temporary increase in blood sugar levels.
- Females may notice inter-menstrual bleeding or an irregular cycle.
- Nerve / blood vessel injury

The possible serious complications from injection are:

- **Infection** – If the area becomes hot, swollen and painful for more than 24 hours, or if you feel generally unwell, you should contact your GP immediately. If they are unavailable, you should seek advice from any GP or Emergency Department.
- **Allergic reaction** to the drug(s) – Please let us know about any allergies. You will be asked to wait for a short time following your injection to check for any sensitivity
- It is advisable **not to drive or operate machinery** for at least 2 hours following the procedure.

You should **not** have the injection carried out if you:

- Have any infection in the area or anywhere else in your body.
- Are allergic to local anaesthetic or cortico-steroid.
- Have had any previous injections in the target joint in the previous 12 months.
- Feel unwell.
- Are due to have surgery in that area soon.
- Are pregnant or breast feeding.
- Have poorly controlled diabetes or are being closely monitored for blood sugar levels
- Do not want the injection.
- Have a history of tuberculosis or myasthenia gravis.

Are there any other alternatives?

Alternatives to injection include the possible use of tablet anti-inflammatory medicines, physiotherapy and lifestyle changes.

Occasionally, it may be useful to seek an opinion from an orthopaedic consultant when you are considering any alternatives.

What happens during the injection?

The benefits and risks of the injection will be explained to you in detail. You will then be placed in a comfortable position. The skin is cleaned with antiseptic. A needle is

gently positioned into the affected area and the solution is injected through the needle. A plaster will be placed over the site. A few minutes after the injection you will be examined again.

Will I feel any pain?

The injection is not particularly painful. However, a sharp pain will be experienced as the needle punctures the skin. If local anaesthetic is used, this may help to reduce any discomfort.

What happens after the procedure?

If local anaesthetic has been included, pain may start to reduce immediately. It may return as the effect wears off (similar to when you visit the dentist). The cortisone starts to work in 24–48 hours and can sometimes take a little longer. It remains active for approximately 14 days and this anti-inflammatory effect can last much longer. It does not necessarily mean that you will need any further injection.

It is important to follow any advice given to you. You may be asked to keep a note of symptoms or to keep a pain diary.

What do I need to do after I go home?

Depending on the cause of your symptoms, you may be asked to rest the limb for a short period (24 to 48 hours). This does not usually mean total rest but refraining from activities that make any pain worse. Following this 'relative' rest, try to gradually return to full function. Any rest is to maximise the benefits of the injection.

You may also be shown some exercises to do at home or referred for physiotherapy treatment. If you are continuing with or starting any medical treatment within the next six weeks, you should inform the practitioner you have recently received a corticosteroid injection.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You may be asked to attend a follow-up appointment a few weeks after your injection to check your progress. Occasionally, more than one injection is needed, and this can be discussed at this appointment.

Have your say

NHS MyHealth Devon aim to provide high quality content for patients. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about this information leaflet, please visit https://myhealth-devon.nhs.uk/about/contact.

NHS MyHealth Devon Team
myhealth.devon@nhs.net

Published: March 2022
Review Date: March 2025