

Joint and soft tissue injections

Why may an injection be considered?

Injections to joints and soft tissue can be very effective in giving pain relief and reducing inflammation. Injections are often given for short term pain relief to aid rehabilitation.

What types of injection are there?

- Corticosteroid, which is used to reduce pain and inflammation.
- Local anaesthetic, which is used to give temporary numbness.
- Corticosteroid and local anaesthetic combined.

How quickly will the injection work?

The effect of the steroid is usually seen within a few days, but there may be a gradual improvement over a few weeks. If a local anaesthetic is used there will be a temporary numbness lasting a few hours. Caution should be taken as your ability to drive after your injection could be affected for a few hours.

How long will the beneficial effects last?

This varies depending on the condition. The effects may last a few weeks to several months or may resolve the problem.

Are there any side effects?

Side effects are rare, but important to be aware of. These may include:

Post injection flare up of pain

This may last up to 48 hours. Take painkillers, such as paracetamol if you need them

Infection

Infection is rare, but if you develop any of the following symptoms: swelling, redness, warmth around the injection site, or you feel generally unwell, contact your GP or NHS 111

Anaphylactic shock

Anaphylactic shock is an extreme but rare allergic reaction. It usually happens quickly, shortly



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after the injection has been given. We suggest you wait in the clinic area for 30 minutes after your injection in case you experience an adverse reaction.

Dimple or depigmentation

You may develop a dimple or an area of depigmentation (discolouration) around the injection site.

Breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding it may cause a temporary stop to milk production.

Facial flushing and menstrual bleeding

Facial flushing may be present for 24 hours after the injection and if you are pre-menopausal you may experience breakthrough menstrual bleeding.

Fainting

A few people feel faint after their injection. This usually settles by lying down for a few minutes. Advise your clinician if you have a tendency to faint.

Reduced immunity

As some of the steroid is absorbed into the body, it can affect the immune system for two to four weeks and may make you more susceptible to catching infections or more unwell if becoming ill. Also, if you get an infection or become unwell it could take longer to recover. If you have not had chickenpox or measles it is recommended to avoid exposure and seek medical attention if exposed.

Central serous chorioretinopathy

Central serous chorioretinopathy, is a rare side effect causing blurred vision. Should this happen, contact your GP or NHS 111 who may refer you to an ophthalmologist.

Are there any reasons why an injection may not be suitable?

- You have an infection, either at the injection site or a general infection.
- You are taking antibiotics.
- You have a known allergy to either local anaesthetic or steroid.
- Pregnancy, an injection is best avoided particularly in first trimester.
- Vaccinations, it is advisable to leave at least two weeks between vaccinations and steroid injections as a steroid injection may reduce the effectiveness of the vaccination.

Are there any reasons why an injection should be given with caution?

- You have diabetes.
- You have a bleeding disorder or you take blood thinning medication. If you take warfarin, please bring your yellow book to the appointment, so the clinician can check that your INR level is within the therapeutic range.
- There has been any recent trauma (within six weeks) or you have bleeding within your joint.
- You take any form of corticosteroids such as inhalers or tablets, or have any medical condition, which lowers your immune system.

Should I be taking things easy after the injection?

Yes, to gain the most benefit from the injection it is important to follow the advice given, as failure to rest can prevent the injection from working. Maintain gentle activity for the first week following treatment. Avoid any exercise or activities, which have previously worsened your symptoms.

Can the injection be repeated?

This depends on the condition and the response to the first injection. A maximum of three injections can be given over a 12 month period to a specific area or joint. There is some evidence that in some cases of knee osteoarthritis there can be an increase in the development of the arthritis.

Answers to frequently asked questions

- A shoulder injection is often less painful than a blood test.
- The injection does not go into bone or tendons.
- Not all injections work, but the majority achieve significant benefit.
- Injections may be preceded by aspiration of the joint or soft tissue. Aspiration is the removal of fluid to reduce swelling, and to determine if the injection should go ahead. If the fluid drawn off indicates that the injection is not recommended the clinician will discuss with you what happens next.

