

Patient Information

Cortisone Injection

KEY POINTS

- You may suffer a painful flare after the injection. This will settle within a few days.
- If you have diabetes you will need to keep a close eye on your blood sugar levels for 48 hours after the injection
- Keep a note of your response to the injection as that will help inform any further treatment
- Current recommendations are for no more than 2-3 cortisone injections per site per year

What is a cortisone injection?

Cortisone is a type of steroid which is injected, and which is a very powerful agent for reducing inflammation. The effects of cortisone may take several days to work but may last for some weeks or even months.

The local anaesthetic mixed with the cortisone helps in two ways. It helps to spread the cortisone about effectively in the area being treated and it also helps to provide some pain relief for the first few hours.



What are cortisone injections used for?

Cortisone injections may be used therapeutically or diagnostically. In the first case they are used to help treat any underlying inflammation which is causing pain. When used diagnostically your response to the injection will help your doctor to decide exactly where your pain is arising from.

What are the benefits of ultrasound guided injections?

Cortisone injections are most commonly given without the benefit of ultrasound guidance. This is a tried, tested and safe technique. However the benefits of using ultrasound to guide the injection include:

1. Avoiding accidentally giving the injection directly into the tendon
2. If the injection does not help then there is no question about whether it had been put in the wrong place
3. Reassurance to know and see the injection being put in the correct site

How quickly does it work and how long will it last?

The local anaesthetic component works within minutes and lasts for several hours, the cortisone component starts working after a few days and may last weeks.

Side effects and complications

- The commonest side effect is a sudden **increase** in pain at the injection site, which may last 2 or 3 days. This is called a 'flare' and is an unpredictable reaction. While it can be quite painful it is not a cause for concern. Taking simple pain killers and rest are the best treatments.
- Skin thinning. Occasionally, the skin overlying the injection becomes thinned over the course of some months. This is particularly noticeable when several injections are given close to the skin surface. This side effect does **not** happen in most people.
- Skin blanching. Sometimes the skin overlying the injection becomes paler and whiter over the course of some months. This is particularly noticeable when the injection is given close to the skin surface. This side effect does **not** happen in most people.
- Infection. This is a very unusual complication which can occur after any kind of injection. If the injected area becomes red, hot and swollen and you feel unwell, seek immediate medical attention.
- Allergic reaction. This is extremely uncommon and usually happens very quickly. The doctor giving the injection will be able to look after you.

Can I drive afterwards?

Yes, as long as you feel you can safely control the vehicle. It is probably better not to rush straight off after the injection but to sit and relax for 10 minutes. That way you can be sure you will be able to manage on the road.

Can I go straight back to work?

Yes, as long as you feel alright and that you are not in too much pain. If your work involves heavy lifting, then try to reduce the workload over the next few days.

What happens if I have diabetes?

You will need to keep a closer eye on your blood sugars for 48 hours as the sugar levels often rise and you may need more insulin than normal (if you use insulin).

Is there a maximum number of cortisone injections I can have?

There is no absolute fixed maximum number of injections that you can have. The current recommendation is to have no more than 2 or 3 injections per site per year. However, if you are requiring multiple injections on a regular basis for the same problem it might be worth considering another way of treating the problem.

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