

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Rheumatology

## Joint Injection Leaflet

### What is a steroid injection?

A steroid (corticosteroid) injection delivers a small amount of anti-inflammatory medicine directly into a joint (e.g. knee, shoulder) or soft tissue (e.g. tendon sheath, bursa).

It helps reduce pain, swelling and stiffness and can make movement easier.

Relief may start within 24-48 hours, sometimes up to a week, and can last weeks to several months depending on the condition and site.

### How often can I have steroid injections?

To protect joints and tissues, injections should not be given in the same area more than once every three months. Also, no more than 2 joints should be injected during the same session.

### Before your injection, please tell us if you:

- Always being an up-to-date medication list
- Have an active infection anywhere, a fever, or skin infection at injection site (we'll usually postpone).
- Have diabetes (steroids can raise blood sugar temporarily for a week).
- Take blood thinners – Patients on apixaban or similar medicines have a slightly higher risk of bleeding. (if you are on Warfarin, we will need a recent INR) or have a bleeding disorder.
- Are pregnant, trying for a baby, or breastfeeding.
- Are immunosuppressed or have recently been very unwell.
- Avoid steroid injections 2 weeks before or after flu, BCG, MMR, yellow fever, or COVID vaccines.
- Have any allergies (including to local anaesthetic & steroids).
- Will have a joint operation (on the same joint to be injected) soon, avoid injecting that joint within 3-6 months of the surgery.
- Have metal joints as they can't be injected.

We'll discuss risks/benefits for you and may adjusting timing or medicines.

## When are steroid injections used?

They may help with:

- Joint inflammation (e.g. osteoarthritis, inflammatory arthritis flares).
- Bursitis (e.g. subacromial) or tenosynovitis (tendon sheath inflammation).
- Frozen shoulder.
- Trigger finger or plantar fasciitis.
- Local soft-tissue inflammation.

## What happens on the day of injection?

1. You'll be asked to give informed consent and can ask any questions.
2. The area will be confirmed & cleaned.
3. A local anaesthetic may be added to the injection.
4. The injection takes seconds.
5. You'll be observed briefly afterwards and given aftercare advice.
6. Mild discomfort is common for a day or two. You can take simple pain relief (e.g. paracetamol) if needed.

## Occasional side effects

- The lidocaine in the injection gives relief for a few hours, after which you might experience Mild pain or 'steroid flare' for 24-48 hours until the injection becomes effective.
- Facial flushing or mild headache
- Temporary rise in blood sugar
- Changes in mood or sleep

These are usually short live and not serious.

## Rare side effects

- Skin changes at the site (thinning/discolouration), small fat-pad thinning.
- Bleeding or bruising
- Tendon weakening or rupture (if injected into a tendon)
- Joint or soft-tissue infection (very rare but serious)
- Allergic reaction (very rare)

## When to seek urgent help

- Severe pain, redness, swelling, or heat at the site.
- Fever or feeling unwell
- Difficulty moving the injected area
- Signs of allergic reaction (wheeze, swelling, rash) – call 999 immediately.

## After you injection

- Rest the area and avoid heavy use (e.g. walking uphill after knee injection) for 24-48 hours.
- Keep the site clean and dry on the day of the injection.
- You should expect that it generally takes around a week for the pain to improve. The benefit can be felt for up to 3 months. Sometimes it can last for longer (varies from person to person)
- We suggest that you book transport after the injection in view of post-injection numbness or pain for the next 24 hours.

## **Other treatments and self-care**

- Physiotherapy and exercise to improve movement
- Topical or oral pain relief
- Weight management and activity pacing
- Heat and cold packs and rest
- Supportive footwear / braces / insoles as needed

## **Contact us**

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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