

## **Corticosteroid Injections – A Guide to this Procedure**

This information leaflet answers some of the questions that you may have about having a corticosteroid injection. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives and what you can expect when you come to our clinic for your treatment. If you have any queries or concerns, please speak to your referrer or the person treating you.

### **What is a corticosteroid injection?**

Corticosteroid – often known as steroids – is an anti-inflammatory medicine prescribed for lots of different conditions. It is injected directly into the tissues that are causing your symptoms. The person treating you will explain why you need this. You may also have a local anaesthetic at the same time for temporary pain relief.

Corticosteroids are not the same as steroids taken by bodybuilders.

Tell the person treating you if you:

- Have a severe infection and are on antibiotics
- Are allergic to plasters, dressings, local anaesthetic, or steroids
- Feel unwell
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Are diabetic on insulin
- Take warfarin or other blood thinning medications
- Take antiretroviral medication, for example, medication for shingles, HIV
- Feel your symptoms have improved significantly since being referred for the injection
- Do not want the injection

### **Who will give me the injection?**

A consultant radiologist specialist trained to do the procedure.

### **What are the benefits?**

It can help relieve:

- Swelling
- Pain

- Stiffness

This injection may help you start your rehabilitation physiotherapy and return to normal activities sooner by relieving your pain and inflammation. If it is not clear which structures are causing you pain, the injection can help your clinicians diagnose your condition.

## **Consent**

We must by law obtain your verbal consent to any operation and some other procedures beforehand. Staff will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the procedure or treatment proposed, please do not hesitate to speak with a senior member of staff again.

## **What happens after the injection?**

If we used a local anaesthetic, the pain may start to improve a few minutes after the injection, but it may come back when the anaesthetic has worn off.

The steroid usually starts to work after two to three days, but it may take a bit longer. It can take up to two months for you to feel the benefit. If you follow the advice we give you, you shouldn't have any problems.

## **What happens when I go home?**

After your injection, do not drive or cycle for the rest of the day.

We may ask you to keep the area raised and rest it for a few days depending on what area was injected. Avoid doing any activities that will make the pain worse and gradually return to activities that are normal for you. This helps you get the full benefit of the injection.

If the area becomes swollen or painful, you may wish to take pain medication or use an ice pack when you are resting at home. Do not put the ice in direct contact with your skin - wrap it in a tea towel or pillow case before putting it on. Do not leave it on for more than 10 minutes.

## **What are the side effects?**

Common Side Effects (1 in 100people):

- A 'steroid flare' - this means the pain may get worse for 2 days to about 14 days before

it gets better. If this occurs, please take painkillers that you can take. For example paracetamol, ibuprofen - if not sensitive to it, or other stronger medication which may have been prescribed by your GP or clinician.

- A flushed face for a few hours after the injection
- Temporary bruising or bleeding, especially if you are taking blood thinning tablets such as aspirin or warfarin
- Losing a small area of fat around the injection site
- If you are diabetic, your blood sugar levels may increase temporarily
- Headaches
- Joint stiffness

Uncommon Side Effects (1 in 1000 people):

- Light vaginal bleeding or irregular periods
- Wildly fluctuating blood sugar levels in insulin dependent diabetics
- Skin depigmentation may occur in darker skinned individuals in injections to joints close to the skin surface, for example, in hands and feet.
- Vertigo
- Dizziness
- Arrhythmia
- Mood swings

Rare Side Effects:

- Infection. This is very rare (about 1 in 15,000)

If the area becomes hot, swollen and painful for more than three-four days, or if you generally feel unwell, contact your referrer immediately. If they are unavailable, go to your GP or local Accident & Emergency (A&E) department.

After the injection, please avoid activities that may have caused the injury.

### **What are the alternatives?**

- Anti-inflammatory medicines
- Physiotherapy
- Surgery. You will need to talk to your consulting clinician at your NHS or Private hospital about this.

**Please note:** The steroid injection may not work.

## **Exercises**

We may give you some exercises to do at home. We will show you how to do these while you are with us, or you will be advised by your treating physiotherapist.

If you are having any other medical treatment within six weeks of your injection, you should tell the clinician that you have had a corticosteroid injection.

You may have a follow up appointment separately arranged with your referrer. In some cases, you may need another injection. You can talk to your referrer about this.

## **In case of any questions, what do I do?**

Please call us on 01865 881334.

Please talk with the administrator about your concern and they will liaise with the radiologist who performed or is going to perform the injection. He or she will get back to you when it is possible.

Please be aware there may be a few hours before someone gets back to you but we shall try to call back as soon as possible.

If there is a pain control issue after your injection, then you can either see your GP or attend the nearest A&E to get stronger pain killers.

If the pain changes or does not begin to get better after two weeks from the injection, please contact your GP or referring Consultant.

Monitoring your pain in the injected area for six weeks is advised to be sure that the injection worked. You may wish to write a *Pain Diary*.