

Chilwell Valley & Meadows Practice

Local Steroid Injections Information for Patients

Local Steroid Injections

You have been referred to have a local steroid injection here at the surgery. This leaflet is intended to provide you with information about what to expect and to cover all the most common questions that people ask. However if you have any further questions please ask to speak to a doctor or nurse beforehand. We will also explain the procedure on the day and we can answer any final questions then. You will be asked to sign a consent form once you are happy to proceed.

Why are Steroid Injections Given?

A local steroid injection is usually given to reduce inflammation and pain within or around a joint, tendon, or other area of 'soft tissue'. The chemical (corticosteroid) that is used reduces inflammation and helps to soften any internal scar tissue.

The injected steroid is in the form of a depot solution which means that it stays where it is injected and continues to release itself into the area for a period of time afterwards. It does not spread to anywhere else in the body.

Some of the most common conditions treated are listed below:

- Inflamed or stiff joints (from arthritis or gout)
- Tennis elbow and golfers elbow
- Plantar fasciitis ('policeman's heel')
- Tendonitis
- Bursitis
- Trigger finger
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

Your doctor will decide whether or not a steroid injection is likely to be of benefit for your particular problem.

How Effective are Steroid Injections?

The benefit that you are likely to receive from a steroid injection depends on a range of factors including the nature, severity and duration of the underlying problem, the disability that it is causing, and any factors that will continue to put strain on the area after the injection.

There are no guarantees that a steroid injection will improve your situation although, on average, they provide some benefit in 70-90% of people. However an injection should only be given if other, less invasive treatments, have been tried first, and the condition is having a significant effect on your life.

Some conditions benefit from a second or third injection, or from following up with some physiotherapy. Again, your doctor will advise you about this.

Your Appointment

If you are asked to make an appointment for a steroid injection then please make sure that you tell the receptionist that this is what it is for. This is because only certain doctors perform these procedures and they need adequate time allocated to them. Please make sure that you arrive on time.

It is often a good idea to bring someone with you to the appointment, particularly if you are nervous. They can either wait in the waiting room, or come in to the consulting room with you. If you come alone then you are likely to be fit to drive afterwards unless you have had a procedure carried out on your foot.

The Procedure

The exact procedure depends on the problem that is being treated. However before you have the injection the doctor will want to examine you and may place a mark over the area to be injected. Please make sure that you wear clothing that can easily be removed in order to gain access to the area.

The doctor will clean the skin before giving the injection in order to avoid introducing any infection. The injection itself may be uncomfortable for up to 30 seconds but then you should stop feeling any pain during the rest of the procedure. The whole process usually only takes two or three minutes to complete.

A plaster or dressing will be applied to the injection site. Please let the doctor know if you are allergic to any type of plaster.

What Happens Next

Over the next two or three days the area that has been injected may be more uncomfortable than usual. This is because extra fluid has been introduced into it. You should take extra pain relief, if needed, to compensate for this. However, as the injection is localised you will not experience any generalised side-effects in your body.

The benefits of the injection begin gradually, and the injection can take up to three weeks or longer to reach its maximum effect. If you have not had any benefit after six weeks then you should consider returning to your doctor for a review.

Most people do not need to take any time off work following a local steroid injection. However it does depend on the type of work that you do and the nature of the injection. Please check beforehand if you are worried about the after-effects of the procedure.

Complications

The rate of complications from local steroid injections is very low with most people having no problems at all. However no procedure is completely free of risk and it is important that you understand what could happen before you agree to proceed.

The following risks are well recognised, but there may also be risks not included in this list that are unforeseen by the doctors:

- There may be allergic reactions to the medicines injected into joints, to tape or the chemicals used to clean the skin for instance.
- You may develop 'post-injection flare' which is joint swelling and pain several hours after the corticosteroid injection. This only occurs in approximately one out of 50 patients and usually subsides within several days.
- There may be infection, although this is extremely rare. If, however, the area that has been injected becomes red, hot and swollen in the few days after the injection please seek urgent medical attention (ring the surgery or 111).
- Joint damage may result from frequent corticosteroid injections. Generally, repeated and numerous injections into the same site should be discouraged.
- De-pigmentation (a whitening of the skin over the site of the injection).
- Local fat atrophy (thinning of the skin) at the injection site.
- Rupture of a tendon located in the path of the injection if inadvertently injected.
- Pain may be associated with this procedure and the healing process.

If you have concerns about any possible complications then please ask speak to the doctor at the time.