

STEROID INJECTION INFORMATION

(adapted from Versus Arthritis (2021))

INTRODUCTION

Steroid injections can be a quick and effective treatment for soft tissue conditions, joint pain and inflammation, although the improvement is usually temporary. They are normally given as part of a wider rehabilitation programme. You can discuss the benefits and risks of steroid injections with healthcare professionals before you start treatment, so you are able to make an informed decision.

WHAT ARE STEROID INJECTIONS AND HOW ARE THEY USED?

Some steroids occur naturally in the human body. Artificial steroids act like natural steroids to reduce inflammation. They are not the same as anabolic steroids used by body builders to increase muscle size and strength.

Steroid treatment for arthritis and related conditions can be taken as tablets or given as injections into the affected area.

Steroid injections are often recommended for people with rheumatoid arthritis and other types of inflammatory arthritis. They may also be recommended for osteoarthritis if your joints are very painful or if you need extra pain relief for a time. The injection can reduce inflammation which in turn should reduce pain.

Here at Adelaide Medical Centre, we tend to use methylprednisolone, also known as Depo-Medrone. The effect of Depo-Medrone may take a couple of days. Another injection may be given after approximately 12 weeks after discussion with the healthcare practitioner.

Loose fitting clothes may be more comfortable if you are having a steroid injection.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW BEFORE I HAVE A STEROID INJECTION?

You will not be able to have a steroid injection if you have an infection, particularly if it is in the area of the body that needs treating.

If you have diabetes, please be aware that having a steroid injection can raise your blood sugar levels for a few days.

Having too many steroid injections into the same area may cause damage to the tissue inside the body. Please discuss further with the healthcare practitioner if concerned.

If you have a condition called haemophilia where your blood does not clot properly, it is advisable to discuss steroid injections and the risk of bleeding with your doctor.

It is important not to overdo it for the first 2 weeks after having a steroid injection. There is a small risk that if you exercise a joint too much immediately after a steroid injection you may damage the tendons. It is important to continue any exercises given to you by your physiotherapist/health practitioner.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS

Most people have steroid injections without any side effects. They may be uncomfortable at the time of injection, but many people feel the procedure is not as bad as feared.

Occasionally, people may notice a flare-up in their joint within the first 24 hours after a steroid injection. This should settle in a couple of days.

Steroid injections may occasionally cause some thinning or changes in the colour of the skin at the injection site.

Rarely, you may get an infection in the joint at the time of an injection. If the joint becomes more painful and hot you should see your doctor promptly, especially if you feel unwell.

Steroid injections can sometimes cause temporary changes to women's periods. They can also cause changes in people's mood – you may feel very high or very low. This may be more likely if you have a history of mood disturbance. If you are worried please discuss further with your health practitioner.

VACCINATIONS

Steroid injections reduce the effect of your body's immune system in the short term. This is how they reduce inflammation.

Some vaccines work by giving you a very small dose of a particular disease, so that you then become immune to it. It is advisable that you do not have a steroid injection within 2 weeks of having a Covid vaccine.

This information leaflet is a guide to steroid injections, their benefits and potential side effects. If there is anything else you would like to know about steroid injections, please ask.

Many thanks
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