

## Patient Information Leaflet for Steroid injections.

Steroid injections are commonly used for the treatment of joint and soft tissue disorders. Steroids have been shown to be helpful for easing pain and reducing high levels of inflammation. They may also protect the cartilage within joints.

Steroid injections are often used in conjunction with local anaesthetic. There are several different formulations of both steroid and anaesthetic which may be used.

Like all medication, an individual's response to a steroid injection cannot be predicted. Most patients experience an improvement in their symptoms lasting a few weeks. For some the beneficial effect will persist for several months. Some patients unfortunately gain little or no benefit.

This information sheet is intended to supplement the advice you will be given by your doctor with regard to the role of steroid injections in your circumstances.

***Injections are not suitable for all patients. Please inform the doctor or therapist if you believe any of the following may apply to you;***

- Allergy to steroid or local anaesthetic
- Infection close to the site of the proposed injection or a significant injection elsewhere
- Broken skin or rash at the site of the proposed injection
- A tendency to bleed more readily because of illness or medication
- Surgical metalwork at the site of the proposed injection, for example a joint replacement, screws, plates etc.

***The risk of a complication arising from a steroid injection is low and serious complications are extremely rare. However occasionally the following may occur and may require medical attention;***

- Some patients experience deterioration in their symptoms for about 48 hours after the injection. Rest and simple pain killers usually help.
- Infection may be introduced into the joint or soft tissues as a result of an injection. This is extremely rare but can have very serious consequences if not identified and treated promptly. If you experience progressive warmth, swelling or worsening symptoms at the injection site particularly in association with fever, seek urgent medical attention.
- Allergic reaction to the steroid or local anaesthetic. Any medication has the potential to precipitate an allergic reaction even in someone who has previously encountered the same medication without problem. This is most likely to occur within 20 minutes of the injection. You should therefore remain in the department for this time. Symptoms of severe allergy include wheeze or difficulty breathing, swelling of the face, throat or tongue, rash or itching, stomach cramps and vomiting, or feeling very unwell. Call for immediate help if necessary
- Facial flushing (warmth and redness) may occur. This will usually resolve after 24-72 hours and predominantly affects women. It is not an allergy and does not preclude future injections.
- Thinning of the skin and soft tissues at the site of the injection may occur resulting in a dimple. Occasionally the formation of a small lump or loss of a small area of skin colour may also occur.
- Tendons may weaken when in contact with steroid resulting in rupture. This effect is thought to be very rare and may primarily affect damaged tendons already predisposed to rupture.
- The steroid may occasionally cause irregular vaginal bleeding for a few weeks.

- Joint and soft tissue steroid injections can cause a rise in blood sugar for a few days in diabetic patients. The effect however is usually negligible and would not normally necessitate a change in treatment. In certain circumstances additional monitoring may be recommended.
- Some individuals are susceptible to fainting during medical procedures. Faints result from a sudden short-term fall in blood pressure. Please inform the doctor or physiotherapist in advance if you feel this may be likely so that precautions can be taken.
- Bleeding or bruising. This is more likely if you are taking certain medications for example aspirin or warfarin and usually settles with simple pressure. **If you experience severe swelling or bruising after the injection, please seek prompt medical attention.**

### **After the injection**

If you have a local anaesthetic, the pain in your joint will ease within a few minutes. The effects of the local anaesthetic may last for a couple of hours or sometimes more. You may need pain relief to help with any discomfort as the anaesthetic wears off.

You may be asked to wait at the practice or clinic for a short time, to make sure you feel OK. This will usually only be for around 10 to 15 minutes if so. Once you feel ready, you'll be able to go home. It's usually best if a friend or family member can drive you home.

As the local anaesthetic wears off, the pain in your joint may initially be worse than before you had the injection. This pain is due to inflammation caused by the injection itself. It may last for a day or two. The following tips may help you manage the pain.

- Try putting ice or a cold compress on the area. This can reduce swelling and bruising. Don't apply ice directly to your skin – always wrap it in a towel first. Only apply it for up to 20 minutes at a time.
- Take over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. Always read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine. If you have any questions, ask your pharmacist for advice.
- Rest your joint for a day or two at least. You should be careful not to do too much using the joint for the first couple of weeks.

It can take up to a week for the steroid injection to start working and easing your pain. Your health professional may give you some gentle exercises to do. You can slowly build these up as your symptoms improve.