
Cortisone Injections

Knowing what to expect from a cortisone injection can help you plan for what might happen during and after the procedure.

What is a cortisone injection?

Cortisone injections are often used to treat osteoarthritis in joints. The injections use steroids to decrease the amount of inflammation in your joint, which will often decrease the amount of pain you experience. You can expect your joint pain will subside within minutes after the injection is administered as the injection contains a temporary pain reliever in addition to the corticosteroid. This anesthetic response will last for several hours, after which your baseline pain will return. Your joint inflammation symptoms, including pain, should improve over the next two to three weeks after the injection as the corticosteroid begins to take effect.

Keep in mind that it is important to space out your cortisone injections over the course of a year. It is not recommended to have them too close together or to exceed three or four treatments over a span of 12 months.

Post injection care:

- Avoid using the affected joint excessively for the next two days. For example, if the injection is administered in your knee, avoid running, jumping or any other aggressive physical activity. You may continue with typical everyday activities.
- Avoid swimming or soaking the area in water. Opt for showers instead of baths in the days following the injection.

Common side effects:

If you experience side effects, they will likely occur within 48 hours of receiving the injection.

- Minor bleeding immediately after getting the injection.
- Pain at the injection site.
- Soreness in the muscle group that surrounds your affected joint.
- Slight discoloration of your skin at the site of the injection.
- Aggravation of the inflammation that the injection was intended to treat. **This is called a “cortisone flare”.**

What is a cortisone flare?

According to the Arthritis Foundation, **cortisone flares** are caused by the corticosteroids used in the injection. The corticosteroids in the injection are formulated as slow-release crystals to give you long-term pain relief. Pain relief usually lasts for several months, however, the presence of these crystals can irritate your joint, which is what creates the sensation of pain around the area of the injection.

Cortisone flare management:

- Icing at the site of your injection.
- Taking over-the-counter pain medication, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).

If you experience a cortisone flare, the pain should subside within a few days. ***If you are still experiencing significant pain five days after you receive the injection, you need to speak with your doctor.***

In extremely rare cases, the site of the injection may become infected. This would occur within a week of the cortisone injection. ***If you notice fever, swelling, ongoing bleeding, weeping, or pus coming from the area, speak to your doctor right away about the possibility of an infection. If you suspect an infection and cannot get in touch with your doctor please go to the emergency room.***