

Steroid Injections



What is a steroid injection?

Steroid injections have been used for many years as a quick and effective treatment for soft tissue conditions, joint pain, and inflammation throughout the body.

Artificial steroids mimic naturally occurring steroids within the body. They are introduced to the painful area/joint via an injection and work by reducing inflammation. These steroids are different to anabolic steroids sometimes use in body building.

At Physiotherapy Matters steroid injections are used alongside an individually tailored client assessment and rehabilitation programme to enable the most effective recovery whether that be to sport or pain free normal daily functional activities. There are many benefits to steroid injections which will be documented through this page, however if you have any queries, please contact one of our clinical specialists who can help answer your questions to make an informed decision.

What will be injected?

We will inject the affected joint or soft tissue with a small volume of steroid, this should help reduced inflammation locally. Sometimes this will be alongside a local anaesthetic that acts as a painkiller and may provide immediate temporary pain relief.



What are they recommended for?

Steroid injections are often recommended for people with painful conditions such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, other types of inflammatory arthritis, bursitis and tendinitis.

The injections are used to reduced inflammation which may reduce pain. Steroid injections can also assist with reducing joint swelling and pain which will aid mobility and function of the joint and surrounding soft tissues.

It is important to note that steroid injections are not a permanent solution for these conditions. Steroid injections may not be suitable for everyone and should only be administered by a qualified healthcare professional.



How quickly does it take to feel a reduction in pain and symptoms?

Local anaesthetics can reduce your pain within a few minutes of the injection. The effects of local anaesthetic wear off quickly, but you may have some numbness that could last for up to 24 hours. The steroid affect will take slightly longer to occur, usually 1-2 days to a week. Within this time, you can continue to manage your pain through gentle movement, analgesia, ice or heat packs. It is advised that you take a few days of relative rest from vigorous or excessive exercise/stress of the joint/area affected after the injection.

How long do the affects last?

Steroid injections usually last for up to 3 months, sometimes longer however every patient is different. Steroid injections can promote an anti-inflammatory response which may reduce pain and swelling allowing you to focus on your rehabilitation exercises. This in turn will help to improve your function and pain management.

How do I prepare for a steroid injection?

Loose fitting clothes may be comfortable and access to the joint/area being injected is advisable. You may be advised to wait in the clinic reception for 15-20 minutes after the injection, this is to ensure that if in the unlikely event you have any adverse reaction to the injection you are within a healthcare setting. If you have local anaesthetic, you may wish to arrange transport home for after the injection as numbness may make it difficult for you to drive.

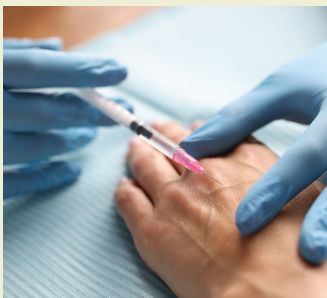
How do I have a steroid injection?

The clinical specialist will complete a full subjective and objective assessment with you to conclude whether an injection is the appropriate treatment for your symptoms. As the patient you will be advised of the risk factors and be provided the appropriate advice and can then make an informed decision as to whether an injection is the correct form of treatment.

Depending on where/what the pain and inflammation is, steroids can be injected:

- Into an inflamed joint
- Into soft tissues near a joint (bursa and tendons)
- Into muscle

Most injections are quick and easy to perform and will be completed within the Physiotherapy Matters clinic. Occasionally certain injections may require ultrasound scans to be performed which is not completed at physiotherapy matters, however most injections can be given effectively without the need for ultrasound.



Important information if considering a steroid injection:

- You will not be able to have an injection if you currently or have recently had any illness or infection within the body
- There is some evidence that suggests that you avoid a steroid injection 1-2 weeks after a subsequent doses of a COVID-19 vaccination
- Some evidence also suggests avoiding a steroid injection for 4-7 weeks after a COVID-19 infection
- If you have diabetes you will need to discuss this with your doctor as a steroid injection can heighten blood sugar levels and lower your immune system for a few days. It is therefore important for your GP to confirm an injection is appropriate, your blood sugars may need to be monitored after the injection
- There is some evidence that suggests too many steroid injections in the same place can cause damage to tissues within the body. It is highly recommended to avoid having steroid injections less than 3 months apart and only up to 3 into the same area/joint within a year
- If you are awaiting joint replacement surgery this will need to be discussed with your surgeon prior to a steroid injection being performed
- If you have suffered any previous adverse reaction to local anaesthetic will need to be discussed with the clinical specialist
- If you suffered with Haemophilia or are taking blood thinning medications (anti-coagulants) you will need to discuss this with your doctor as you might be at risk of increased bleeding from the injection
- After the injection you will be advised to take a period of relative rest for the first 2 weeks after the steroid injection. There is a risk that if you do too much after an injection you could damage soft tissues or reduce the effect of the steroid.
- Rehabilitation advice and exercise will be provided by the clinical specialist. It is important to continue with this to enable your effective recovery. Start gently and gradually build up the amount you can do
- If you are currently pregnant or breastfeeding the evidence surrounding steroid injections and pregnancy is not fully researched or clear therefore, we recommend discussing this with your GP.





Risks and side effects of steroid injections

Most people have steroid injections without any side effects. It is normal to experience slight discomfort and pressure during the time of the injection, but most people report this isn't as bad as they feared.

Post injection pain within the first 24 hours can occasionally occur. This usually settles by itself within a few days, however taking painkillers such as paracetamol may help.

You may notice that your face is flushed for a few hours.

With steroid injections there is a small risk of thinning or colour changes locally in the skin at the injection site.

There is a risk of infection at the site of the injection or in the joint. This is very rare but serious, so if your joint becomes red, hot or painful you should see your doctor or phone 111 immediately especially if you feel unwell.

Steroids are used with care in people who have diabetes as the injection may temporarily raise blood sugar.

The steroid dose is very low therefore normal side effects of steroid tablets are very rare. However, it is important not to overuse injections and it is advised not to have more than 3 per year or within a 3-month period at the same site.

Women's menstrual cycles can very occasionally be temporarily affected after a steroid injection. Steroid injections can also influence people's moods making them feel very high or low. If you have a history of mood disturbance you may want to discuss this with your doctor prior to having an injection.

Can I take my normal medication?

Generally, you can continue to take your normal medications as prescribed with steroid injections. However, if you are using anti-coagulants to thin your blood (such as warfarin) you will need to speak to your GP and have a blood test to make sure your blood is at an appropriate level, to reduce the risk of excessive bleeding into the joint. Your doctor may advise you to adjust your anti-coagulant dosage prior to the injection.

If you have had or require a vaccination?

Some vaccines work by giving you a very small dose of a disease, so that your body creates an immunity to it. Steroid injections lower the body's immune system temporarily; therefore, you will not be able to have one if you have recently had or are planning to have a vaccination.

Speak to your doctor about when you will be able to have your steroid injection after the vaccination to prevent infection or illness.



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