

JOINT INJECTIONS

Joint injections are given for joint problems and arthritis. It involves the injection of cortisone (and sometimes anaesthetic) medication directly into a joint space, to reduce inflammation (swelling) and pain.

When are cortisone injections given?

Cortisone injections are given into a painful joint to reduce pain and swelling in conditions such as gout, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, or other conditions, such as tendinitis and tennis elbow. They are used when there is a flare-up or the pain in the joint is not responsive to other treatments, or when other medications cannot be used. They provide short-term pain relief, usually for a month, but do not improve joint function or stiffness.

Please note: patients often require a consultation prior to having the injection so the GP can assess the joint. In some cases, an x-ray and/or ultrasound may need to be arranged to ensure cortisone injection is the right course of management.

Avoid repeated injections

Cortisone injections are used as short-term relief and regular, repeated steroid injections are not recommended. Excessively frequent, repeated injections into the same area can cause the bone, ligaments and tendons to weaken. Generally cortisone injections are not given more often than three or four times a year and they are at least six weeks apart.

The injection procedure

1. Before giving you the cortisone injection a separate syringe and needle is used to remove any excess fluid from the joint.
2. Your doctor is then able to examine the fluid and send a sample to the laboratory for diagnosis.
3. The reduced pressure of the fluid in the joint also relieves the pain and may help the joint to heal.
4. Cortisone injection starts to act slowly over 24-36 hours and the beneficial effects may last for days or months. A local anaesthetic may also be given, to relieve pain immediately and lasts for three to four hours while the cortisone is beginning to take effect.

Care after the injection

After you've had a cortisone injection, it is important to rest the joint for about 24 hours and avoid excessive movement or stress on the joint for about one week.

Sometimes there is increased pain in the joint after the injection, which settles within 24 hours. To relieve the discomfort, you should rest, apply ice and take pain relief such as paracetamol (or as advised by your doctor).