

WHAT IS A CORTICOSTEROID AND HOW WILL IT HELP MY SYMPTOMS?

The corticosteroid is an anti-inflammatory medicine that works by reducing inflammation, which in turn can help to ease pain. Steroids are naturally found in the body and a corticosteroid is a synthetic version of it.

A number of different steroids are available for this procedure and your consultant and/or radiologist will decide which one they feel will help to ease your particular symptoms. Some can begin being effective almost immediately while others take longer to start working but can also have a more prolonged effect.

WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

A consultant radiologist (medical doctor specialising in imaging) will use the ultrasound machine to locate the area of interest. The radiologist and the assistant will then spend a few moments drawing up the medications to be used.

A quick acting local anaesthetic is sometimes used to numb the skin and to help reduce any immediate discomfort. Please note that this will not have any effect on the inflammation and will wear off within about one hour.

A soluble steroid, often mixed with a longer acting anaesthetic is then introduced into the area with a fine needle, using the ultrasound probe to guide it precisely into the specific area.

Some patients do feel a little pain but this is usually short-lived.

WILL I HAVE TO PREPARE?

You do not need to do anything special before the injection. Some people find bringing someone with them helps to ease any anxiety. It may also be advisable to arrange transport home as the local anaesthetic can cause temporary numbness, which can affect driving and cycling.

Women who are trying to conceive or in early pregnancy should inform their doctor beforehand.

WILL IT HURT?

Everyone has different pain thresholds; however some patients do feel an increased level of discomfort during and sometimes after the procedure.

WHAT ARE THE AFTERCARE PROCEDURES?

As the steroid you have had injected can take 24-48 hours to begin working you may be advised to rest the area which has been injected for a couple of days where possible. This does not necessarily mean total bed rest but for you to stop the activities that make your pain worse.

ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS OR POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS?

Corticosteroids will only be prescribed if the potential benefits of treatment outweigh the risks. Side effects are rare but can include:

- A steroid flare - This is a sudden increase in pain from an unpredictable reaction to an ingredient in the steroid. Do not worry. This pain can last up to 2-3 days and you should take painkillers and rest.
- Diabetic patients may see a temporary increase in their blood sugar levels and should monitor blood glucose levels for three days after the injection.
- Skin thinning, blue discoloration and lightening after a few months can occur particularly where injections have been given close to the skin surface.
- Menstrual irregularities have also been reported although this is uncommon.

HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Some benefits may be felt immediately due to the long acting anaesthetic, which may have been mixed in with the corticosteroid. Most begin working within 24-48 hours but the benefits may not be felt for up to a couple of weeks later.

DO I NEED TIME OFF WORK?

This very much depends on your job and which body part you have had injected. Patients are usually advised to avoid activities that make the pain worse.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact your referrer in the first instance as they will know more about your medical history and will have a greater understanding of your specific situation.