



CONDITION

Steroid Injections Information Sheet

Steroid injections are often given to patients in the hand clinic.

These injections can be recommended for people with rheumatoid arthritis, other types of inflammatory arthritis, osteoarthritis or other conditions causing soft tissue inflammation and swelling. The injection works by reducing inflammation and swelling near where it is put in. Reducing inflammation and swelling then reduces pain.

A number of different steroids are available for injection. Short-acting soluble steroids can give relief within hours and should last for at least a week. The longer-acting, less soluble steroids may take around a week to become effective but can ease your symptoms for two months or longer. The injection type we usually use in the hand clinic also contains a small amount of local anaesthetic mixed in with the steroid. This help to numb any pain immediately after the injection has been given. The local anaesthetic might also make the surrounding area, or finger, feel a little numb for an hour or so after the injection.

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

- directly into an inflamed joint (intra-articular injection)
- into inflamed soft tissues (for instance around a tendon or nerve)
- into a muscle (intra-muscular injection).

Most injections are quick and easy to perform and can usually be given in clinic. An ultrasound scan or xray can sometimes be useful to guide injections into difficult to reach spots.

Current guidelines state that steroids are not harmful in pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding. In addition, single steroid injections shouldn't affect fertility if you are trying for a baby. If, however, you are pregnant or breastfeeding you may wish to bring that up and discuss it with your doctor before going ahead with a local steroid injection. If you have any condition that increases your chances of infection, such as diabetes for instance, you should also mention that to your doctor.

Possible side-effects:

- The steroid injection we use in hand clinic takes approximately 5-7 days to work and give you relief of pain.
- 24-48 hours after the injection many people have an increase of pain before things improve (the so called 'steroid flare'). Simple painkillers may help with this, and resting the affected area.
- The injection does not always work to relieve symptoms.
- Possible complications around the area of the injection include:
 - infection
 - tendon damage
 - joint lining damage
 - nerve damage
 - bleeding/bruising
 - loss of pigmentation (skin goes paler coloured – this can be permanent)

Many patients have no symptoms at all following a steroid injection though, and the majority have only very minor side effects.

If you do think you are developing an infection however you should have a healthcare professional look you over. Things to look out for are significant swelling and redness around the injection site, particularly if the redness is spreading. You may also have a temperature or feel 'off colour' similar to when you are coming down with the flu or a virus.