

Are there alternatives to steroid injections?

There are usually other options to help manage pain symptoms including medications, physiotherapy or self-management. Your health care practitioner should discuss these with you to help you make a decision about which treatment is right for you.

Contact us

If you have any questions, please contact the staff in the Pain Clinic:
01872 252095

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on
01872 252690



Steroid injections

Information for Pain Clinic patients



One + all | we care

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients who are considering steroid injections as part of their pain management. It is to help them make an informed decision about their pain treatment and what is right for them.

What are steroids?

The steroids used in the Pain Clinic are synthetic drugs that closely resemble a naturally occurring hormone (cortisol) that is produced by the adrenal glands. They are different to the steroids used by body-builders.

Why are steroids used in Pain Clinic injections?

Steroids work by reducing inflammation either in joints, around nerves or in muscle. They may also have a direct effect on nerves that helps to provide pain relief. Although steroids are not licenced for use around nerves, they have been used in this way for many years by Pain Consultants and other specialists.

How long do the effects of steroids last?

Steroids tend to provide short term relief that can help you with exercise or physiotherapy to strengthen the affected part of your body. The duration of steroid effects can vary from hours to months.

What are the side effects of steroid injections?

- Weakening of bones (osteoporosis)
- increased appetite and weight gain
- stretch marks, acne and thin skin that bruises easily
- muscle and tendon weakness (that may result in tendon rupture)
- changes in mood (such as becoming aggressive, irritable and short-tempered with people)
- delayed wound healing
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- damage to eyesight (including glaucoma, cataracts and retinal detachment)
- hair loss
- menstrual irregularity in women and low testosterone in men

- stomach ulcers
- mental health problems such as depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety or confusion
- increased risk of infections
- fluid retention and swelling.

How common are these side effects?

Some side effects can occur after a single dose, but in general the risk of experiencing side effects depends on:

- the dose – the higher the dose, the greater the risk of developing side effects
- the length of treatment – the longer you have steroid injections, the more likely you are to develop side effects.

Is it safe to have repeat injections?

Steroids given as tablets or injections can disrupt your body's natural hormone balance. Delaying repeat injections allows the body time to return to its normal balance.

The chance of you experiencing side effects increases with the dose and frequency of injections, and it is important that we weigh up the risks and benefits of repeated treatments. Because of this, your doctor is likely to recommend steroid injections are not repeated indefinitely.

If you are prescribed steroids, or receive steroid injections, from other doctors this will further increase your risk.

Are steroid injections for pain right for me?

If a steroid injection allows you to exercise and strengthen the affected part of your body it can be helpful. Injections on their own are not a cure or a way of managing pain in the long term. Doctors are increasingly concerned that the harm of repeated injections can outweigh the benefits.

The recent guidelines from NICE, the UK body that assesses healthcare interventions, suggested that steroid injections should no longer be used for low back pain.