

# Steroid injections

Information for Pain Clinic patients



## **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.

## **Are there any problems with steroid injections?**

Potential problems following each injection:

- changes in mood (such as becoming aggressive, irritable or depressed)
- increased risk of infections including severe covid-19. If the area injected becomes red, hot and swollen, see your GP urgently, or attend the Emergency Department
- small area of fat loss or change in skin colour around the injection site
- a temporary increase in pain 24-48 hours after the injection
- menstrual irregularity
- temporary rise in blood sugar levels in diabetics.

## **Cumulative problems after repeated injections:**

- thinning of bones, muscles, tendons, skin
- hormonal changes - reduced libido, weight gain, fluid retention, raised blood pressure; hair loss
- damage to eyesight.

## **Is it safe to have repeat injections?**

Cumulative problems increase with dose, frequency and number of injections. Indefinite repetition of injections is not recommended. The offer of repeat injections will depend on individual benefit and 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.

## **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 252160.

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

