

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CORTISONE INJECTIONS

Dr. Kyle Flikkema

WHAT IS CORTISONE?

Cortisone is a kind of medicine called a corticosteroid. Corticosteroids are strong anti-inflammatory drugs and are found naturally within the body or produced synthetically for injection.

HOW DOES CORTISONE WORK?

It works by decreasing inflammation (swelling) of tendons, joints or bursa (fluid filled sac located around joints). Cortisone typically takes effect in 1-2 days but can take up to 10-14 days to start working.

HOW IS CORTISONE GIVEN?

Cortisone is mixed with a local anesthetic like Lidocaine or Marcaine and injected into an area or joint that is painful. A small pinch followed by pressure is most often noticed.

AFTER THE INJECTION

One may do activity as tolerated without restriction, but avoiding painful activities is usually best. Increased pain may be noticed for 24-48 hours. If this occurs, NSAIDS (ibuprofen), Tylenol, gentle stretching, and icing can be helpful. Gradual improvement of symptoms usually is noticed in the weeks that follow. If improvement is not noticed by four weeks, then you should follow up with your physician. A different type of shot, different treatment or additional imaging may be recommended.

HOW OFTEN CAN I HAVE THE INJECTION?

Sometimes more than one injection is necessary to treat a specific problem or narrow down multiple problems. On average, injections can be repeated at the same location after three months.

ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS?

Generally, no. Most people tolerate the injections just fine. Since the cortisone is given as an injection, most of the medication stays in the local area and only a small amount is absorbed systemically. The following can occur in some people:

- As listed above, some people may notice increased pain for 24-48 hours.
- Diabetics may note an increase in blood sugars for up to a week after injection and so should monitor and adjust their treatment.
- Bruising of skin at injection site
- Infection (very rare)

WHO SHOULDN'T HAVE A CORTISONE INJECTION?

There are very few contraindications in the use of cortisone injections. However, the following conditions should be fully discussed with an orthopedic professional before seeking a cortisone injection:

- Infection of a joint (septic arthritis)
- Skin infection at the site of the injection
- Allergic reaction to previous cortisone injections
- Usage of blood thinners, such as Coumadin®
- Acute injury (head trauma, broken bones)