



What is a joint injection?

Your doctor or surgeon has referred you for corticosteroid (steroid) injection as they believe that it may provide relief of your pain in a joint. The injection can be performed for areas such as; shoulders, knees, wrists, hands or ankles. Steroid medication decreases inflammation and can assist in relieving pain and may reduce synovial inflammation. They do not provide long-term pain relief and do not alter the course of underlying joint disease (e.g. osteoarthritis).

Under the guidance of ultrasound, CT or X-rays, an injection of steroid medication and long-lasting anaesthetic can be accurately directed into the required joint. The procedure is performed by a specialist doctor called a radiologist. Pain relief achieved can be long lasting or temporary and some people may experience no relief at all.

How long will the procedure take?



The procedure takes approximately 30 minutes. Please allow time to register at reception and 30 minutes for the procedure. You will be requested to wait up to 30 minutes after the procedure so our staff can be sure that you are ready to be discharged home. In total, you will be in the department for up to 1.5 hours.

Is there any special preparation?

No special preparation is required; however, you may need someone to drive you home after the procedure. Our staff will advise you if this is required, so that you can make appropriate arrangements.

At the time of your booking please inform the staff before the procedure if you have any allergies, you take blood thinning medication or you are pregnant or breast feeding.

Please list or bring all of your prescribed medications, those medications that you buy over the counter, including herbal remedies and supplements.

What do I need to bring with me?

On the day of your appointment, please ensure you bring:

- Your referral form (if you have it)
- All previous relevant scans or x-rays
- Medicare and healthcare cards (e.g. DVA or healthcare concession card)
- List of all medications

What happens during the procedure?

A preliminary scan will be used to assist the radiologist in identifying the injection site; this may be marked on your skin with a pen. To reduce the risk of infection an antiseptic solution will be used to clean the skin.

You will remain awake during the procedure. To prevent discomfort the area may be numbed using local anaesthetic which causes a pinprick and stinging sensation that is uncomfortable for a few seconds.

Ultrasound, CT or X-rays will be used to guide the placement of the needle into the joint or area.

If CT or X-rays are used to guide the needle for a joint injection, then a small amount of contrast medium may be injected into the joint to ensure the needle tip is correctly positioned. Sometimes the radiologist may remove some fluid from the joint for analysis or symptomatic relief prior to the injection of local anesthetic and steroid medication.

Are there any after effects from the treatment?

For a few days following the procedure you may experience some discomfort. This is often relieved with simple pain medication and applying ice to the area.

There is a slight risk that following the injection pain and/or swelling in the area could increase, this is called steroid flare. Steroid flare can develop within a few hours of the injection and last up to three days. The pain and/or swelling should go away on its own. Applying ice to the area frequently will help.

What happens after the procedure?

Our staff will advise you of ways to look after yourself following a joint injection. This includes information such as: avoiding strenuous activity for a few days, arranging a follow up appointment with your referring doctor and how to look after the injection site.

What are the benefits?

The injections can assist in relieving pain and may reduce synovial inflammation. The injection may aid in your management by allowing you to undertake appropriate physical therapy.

Overall, steroid injections into joints (particularly the shoulder and the knee) provide short- to medium-term pain relief (3 weeks to 3 months), particularly when combined with appropriate physical therapy.

Are there any risks?

In referring you for this injection, your doctor is of the opinion that the benefit of this procedure for you are greater than the risks.

There are some risks and minor complications associated with joint injections. These include; slight bleeding or bruising at the site, this is more common if you take a blood thinning medication. It is possible that the local anesthetic may not work, which may require a further injection of anesthetic.

Nerve damage is possible; however, this is usually temporary and should improve over a period of time. Permanent nerve damage is rare.

Less common risks and complications may include infection or damage to surrounding structures such as blood vessels, organs and muscles. Some people may have an allergy to injected drugs or the procedure may not be possible due to medical and/or technical reasons.

The use of x-rays (CT or X-rays) or ultrasound to guide the procedure minimises these risks. Although CT and X-rays use ionising radiation to produce images, the radiation doses associated with guiding joint injections are minimal and the associated risks are negligible.

Before the injection the radiologist (or delegate), will discuss the procedure with you in detail, including any risks specific to you. You will be provided with the opportunity to ask questions. It may be necessary to do a formal consultation to make sure that the procedure is the most appropriate for you.

When do I get the results?

The radiologist will send a report outlining the procedure to your referring doctor/surgeon and your regular GP. It is important that you make a follow-up appointment with your referring doctor/surgeon if the injection has not helped to ease your pain.

I still have questions, who can I ask?

Medical information can be complex, and you may receive information that you do not fully understand. It is important for you to consider the risks and outcomes of the procedure as well as your personal needs before making a decision to undergo the procedure.

If you have read this online information and are still unsure if this is the correct procedure for you; before making a booking, you should discuss your questions or concerns with your referring doctor in the first instance. Your regular GP and/ or your family may also be a useful resource. Your referring doctor can answer questions about the risks and benefits of not having the procedure and other options for treatment.

If you have questions before your appointment about what is involved on the day, our staff would be happy to assist. Please contact the practice where you have made your appointment.