KNEE PAIN AND ARTHRITIS

Steroid injections for the knee

A steroid injection puts an anti-inflammatory medicine straight into the knee joint. It can ease pain and swelling for a while, so you can move and exercise more easily, but it does not cure the cause. These are not the anabolic steroids some people use to build muscle.

What to expect from it

- NICE says relief lasts 2 to 10 weeks. In our experience, it lasts 3 to 4 months.
- It helps some people a lot and others very little. We can't tell you in advance.
- Most people have no more than 3 a year in one knee, at least 3 months apart.
- It usually takes a few days to start working, and sometimes up to a week.
- It works best with exercise. Use the easier weeks to build up your strength.
- Too many injections can damage the joint, so we weigh up each one with you.

When it may help

Osteoarthritis
Pain is holding you back from exercise, and gels or tablets have not helped.

Inflammatory arthritis
Such as rheumatoid arthritis. It can settle a swollen knee while other treatment starts.

The main treatments come first: exercise, losing weight if you need to, and anti-inflammatory gel.

What happens on the day

1. **We check first.** The GP examines your knee, explains the benefits and risks, and checks it is safe for you.
2. **We clean your skin.** Wear shorts or loose clothes so we can reach your knee. We wipe it with antiseptic.
3. **The injection.** The needle goes in at the side of your knee, sometimes with numbing medicine. It can hurt a little.
4. **Straight after.** You get a small plaster, and may be asked to wait 10 to 15 minutes to check you feel well.

Tell us first if you have, or take

- Any infection or antibiotics
- Sore or broken skin on the knee
- A recent knee injury
- Blood thinners
- A bleeding problem
- Diabetes
- A weakened immune system
- Allergies
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding
- A vaccine, recent or due
- Knee surgery planned

Some of these mean the injection may need to wait, or may not be right for you. **Do not stop a blood thinner** unless your doctor tells you to.

Please turn over for aftercare, side effects and when to get help

After your injection

Going home
Think about getting a lift. Numbness can make it hard to drive, so wait until your leg feels normal.

First 1 to 2 days
Rest your knee, and move it gently. Keep the plaster clean and dry, and watch for any signs of infection.

Up to 2 weeks
Don't overdo it, even if your knee feels great. Too much too soon has a small risk of damaging a tendon.

After that
Start your exercises gently and build up slowly. Our Simple knee exercises leaflet shows you how to begin.

If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar more often for a few days, as it can rise.

Possible side effects

Most people have no side effects. The ones that can happen include:

A sore knee
More pain in the first day or two. It usually settles. Simple painkillers help.

Skin changes
Occasionally, thinner skin or a change of colour where the needle went in.

A flushed face
Rarely, your face may look flushed for a short time after the injection.

Mood and periods
Short-term changes to periods. Your mood may feel very high or very low.

Bleeding
Rarely, into the joint. The risk is higher if you take a blood thinner.

Joint infection
Very rare but serious. It needs urgent treatment, so know the signs below.

Call 999 if
- Your lips, mouth or throat swell
- You are struggling to breathe
- You collapse or feel faint, with a rash

Contact us the same day if
- Your knee gets more painful, hot, red or swollen
- You have a high temperature, feel shivery or feel unwell
- Your blood sugar stays high, or your mood worries you

If we are closed, phone **NHS 24 on 111**. A hot, painful knee with a fever should not wait until morning.

What happens next

The injection buys you time, so keep up your exercises and stay active while your knee feels better. If the pain comes back, or the injection did not help, talk to us. We can look at your treatment again, discuss another injection if it is safe, or refer you for physiotherapy or to a specialist.

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