



Information About Steroid Injections

Q: Why is a steroid used for my problem?

A: When a body part like a joint, bursa, or tendon has a significant amount of inflammation, there can be considerable pain. Steroid medication, which is a strong anti-inflammatory, can reduce the inflammation and relieve the pain of your condition. An injection is the most direct and effective way to put the medicine right where the problem is.

Q: What steroid was used?

A: The type of steroid used is cortisone-like medication called a corticosteroid. Cortisone is a natural substance that is produced by your body in times of physical stress. We usually use Depo-Medrol (methylprednisolone), which is a man-made substance similar in structure and function to cortisone but engineered to be safer and with less side-effects. This steroid should not be confused with those taken orally (i.e. Prednisone) for medical reasons or with those taken illegally by athletes and bodybuilders (Anabolic steroids).

Q: Are there side-effects?

A: Steroid injections into joint or soft tissue mostly remain inside these structures and have very little effect on the rest of the body, especially compared to the other types of steroids. The most common side-effect is post injection inflammation at the site of body part being treated. These effects are only temporary and last 24-48 hrs. We recommend using ice at the injection site and the use of anti-inflammatories (e.g. Aleve, Advil) until symptoms resolve. There is a very minor risk of joint infection or skin depigmentation (lightening of skin) at injection site. Diabetic patients typically experience a spike in the blood sugar lasting 1-2 days. Repetitive steroid injections carry some risk of cartilage damage or weakening of tendons and ligaments. We significantly reduce this risk by limiting injections to 3 or 4 in the same body part over the course of one year.

Q: Does the steroid only “mask” the pain?

A: No. The steroid actually reduces the amount of inflammation causing the pain. Injections may not help the underlying problem that caused the inflammation, so we may suggest other treatments to correct the underlying problem.

Q: How soon and how long will I benefit from an injection?

A: The steroid may help within a few days but generally takes 1-2 weeks to achieve maximal benefit. There may be some instant relief in the first day because we do mix the steroid with a local anesthetic. In many cases the injection may even be curative.