

Cortisone Injections

Patient Information Sheet

What is a cortisone injection?

A cortisone injection is a treatment used to reduce **inflammation**, **swelling**, and **pain**. Cortisone is a strong anti-inflammatory medication similar to a hormone your body naturally produces.

It is commonly used for pain in:

- Joints (knee, shoulder, hip)
- Spine joints (neck or low back)
- Tendons and bursae

The medication is injected directly into the painful area to target inflammation.

How does it work?

Inflammation can irritate nerves and tissues, causing pain and stiffness. Cortisone:

- Reduces swelling
- Calms irritated tissue
- Improves movement and function

Pain relief may start within **2–7 days**, sometimes sooner, and occasionally up to **2 weeks**.

Benefits of cortisone injections

Cortisone injections may:

- Reduce pain and stiffness
- Improve movement and daily function

- Help you participate in physiotherapy
- Reduce the need for oral pain medications

Pain relief often lasts **weeks to months**, but results vary.

How often can injections be given?

To reduce risks:

- Most areas should not be injected more than **3–4 times per year**
- Injections are usually spaced **at least 3 months apart**
- Repeated injections in the same spot increase the chance of tissue damage

Your doctor will tailor the plan to your condition.

Common side effects (fairly frequent, usually mild)

Side effect	How common
Temporary pain flare (increased pain for 1–3 days)	10–30%
Injection site soreness or bruising	10–20%
Facial flushing (warmth/red face for 1–2 days)	5–15%
Temporary rise in blood sugar (diabetes)	20–40%
Mild swelling or warmth	5–10%

These effects usually resolve on their own.

Less common side effects

Side effect	Estimated risk
Skin thinning or lightening at injection site	1–5%
Fat loss under the skin (local dent)	<1–3%
Temporary sleep disturbance or mood change	1–5%
Headache	<5%
Menstrual irregularity (temporary)	<5%

Rare but important risks

	Risk	Estimated frequency
Infection		<0.1–0.5% (1 in 200–1,000)
Tendon weakening or rupture		<1% , higher with repeated injections
Joint cartilage damage (with frequent injections over time)		Risk increases with >3–4/year
Allergic reaction		Very rare (<0.1%)
Bleeding or hematoma (higher if on blood thinners)		<1–2%

Serious complications are uncommon when injections are spaced appropriately and done with sterile technique.

Effects on the whole body (systemic effects)

Although cortisone is injected locally, small amounts can enter the bloodstream:

Effect	Risk
Temporary blood sugar rise (in diabetics)	Common (20–40%)
Temporary blood pressure rise	<5–10%
Fluid retention or bloating	<5%
Suppression of body's own steroid hormones (short-term)	Rare with single injection

Systemic side effects are **much less common** than with oral steroids.

Who should be cautious?

Tell your doctor if you:

- Have **diabetes**
- Are on **blood thinners**
- Have an **active infection or fever**
- Are **pregnant**
- Have had **multiple injections in the same area**
- Have immune system conditions

What should I do after the injection?

- Rest the area for **24–48 hours**
- Avoid heavy lifting or intense exercise
- Use ice for soreness if needed

- Resume activity gradually as pain improves
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When should I seek medical help?

Contact your doctor if you have:


- Increasing redness, warmth, or swelling after 48 hours
 - Fever or chills
 - Severe or worsening pain
 - Drainage from the injection site
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Key points to remember

- Cortisone injections reduce inflammation and pain
 - Benefits are usually temporary but can be meaningful
 - Side effects are usually mild and short-lived
 - Risks increase with **frequent or repeated injections**
 - Used carefully, cortisone injections are **generally safe**
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