

General information: injections for the treatment of pain

The aim of this information sheet is to provide you with general information relating to injection treatments and to answer some questions that you may have. Please note that practice may vary depending on which injection is being given. Your doctor will be able to explain fully what to expect and describe your procedure and the risks in detail.

Injections are made over or into joints, around specific nerves or sometimes around soft tissues. Often, several injections are undertaken during the same procedure. Injections can help your pain by reducing some of the pain signals and, although pain relief may be short-lived, some people can get significant and long-lasting pain relief from these injections. It may not be a cure. Sometimes injections are used to help to identify the area where your pain is coming from, therefore helping with diagnosis.

Injections usually contain local anaesthetic with a small amount of steroid. The injection is normally given alongside other treatments, such as physiotherapy.

Is this the right treatment for me?

Other treatment options will be discussed with you before deciding to go ahead with the injection(s) and your consent will be needed. The decision on whether or not to go ahead with the injection(s) is a shared decision between you and your doctor. Your doctor will be able to provide you with up to date information about the likelihood of this being a successful treatment for you, and how this treatment fits into your care. If you are undecided about whether or not to have injections, further advice and information to make this decision can be provided. Please speak to your doctor for more information.

If your health has changed, it is important to let your doctor know:

- If you have an infection in your body or on your skin, your doctor will postpone the treatment until the infection is cleared
- If you have started anticoagulant or antiplatelet medicines that thin the blood, such as warfarin, rivaroxaban, heparin or clopidogrel, this may require extra preparation.
- If you take anti-retroviral medicines, as these can interact with the steroids used in the injections
- If you suffer from diabetes, the use of steroids during injections may cause your blood sugar to change requiring monitoring and adjustment of your diabetic medication
- If you have any allergies.

You must also inform the doctor if there is any chance that you could be pregnant.

Also, if you are planning to fly or travel abroad within two weeks of the injections, please let your doctor know as it may be best to change the date of the injections.

What will happen to me during the treatment?

Before the injection, your doctor will discuss the procedure with you. Your doctor will either obtain your consent before the injection or confirm this consent if it was previously given. An x-ray machine (or other form of image guidance) may be used to enable accurate injection. Not all doctors undertake these injections in exactly the same way but the following usually happens:

- You will be prepared for the procedure as per local guidelines
- Observations such as blood pressure and pulse rate may be made
- A cannula (small needle) may be placed in the back of your hand
- You will be carefully positioned and the skin around the injection site will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution or spray; this can feel very cold
- X-ray (or an alternative way of guiding the needles) will be used if necessary
- You will feel a stinging sensation as local anaesthetic is injected to numb the skin and surrounding tissues. Your doctor will warn you of this first
- The doctor will direct the injections to the area suspected to be a source of pain. When the injections are made, you may feel pressure, tightness or a pushing sensation. If there is any discomfort, do let the doctor know.

What will happen to me after the injections?

After the injection, you will be taken to a recovery ward area where nursing staff will observe you. If you have had sedation you may feel a little drowsy and wish to sleep. Sometimes you will be asked to lay flat for about 30 minutes or longer. You may be assisted to sit up and your blood pressure and pulse may be checked. You will be advised when to get dressed and be given assistance to help ensure that you can stand safely after the procedure.

Your pain will be assessed at rest and during activities of daily living such as walking and moving your back to find out how much pain relief you have obtained following the injection. This will help plan future treatments. You will be given further advice when you are ready to go home.

When will I be able to go home from hospital after my injections?

You will usually be able to return home within a few hours after the injection and in some cases much sooner, depending on how long your doctor or nurse want you to stay for recovery. Please ensure that you have made arrangements for someone to collect you after the procedure. Failure to do so will likely result in your procedure being cancelled. It is unsafe for you to drive home immediately after the procedure. If you do so your motor insurance will be invalid.

What can I do after my procedure?

Ideally, you should arrange for someone to stay with you for 24 hours but, failing that, you should at least have access to a telephone. You should not drive, operate machinery, sign legal documents, provide childcare unsupervised or drink alcohol until fit to do so.

If in doubt, please discuss these issues with your doctor for further advice.

When can I return to work after the procedure?

This will vary between individuals and may depend on the nature of your work. It is difficult to give general advice and so you should discuss this with your doctor.

Will I experience any side effects?

As with any procedure, side effects may occur. These are usually minor and there is little risk of serious harm but your doctor will advise of any more serious ones. Side effects may include:

- Mild local tenderness and/or bruising at the site of the injection, that usually settles over the first few days
- The local anaesthetic may occasionally spread causing some numbness and/or weakness. Should this happen, the effect is temporary and will resolve within minutes or, perhaps, hours
- Infection. This is rare. You should seek medical help if there is local warmth or redness over the site of injection with tenderness and/or you feel hot and unwell. This may require antibiotic treatment
- Nerve injury rarely happens and serious nerve injury is very rare
- Injection treatments are not always effective and may not help your pain.

What can I expect in the days afterwards?

You may experience some soreness or aching at the injection site. Please keep the area of the injections dry for 24 hours following the procedure. Do not worry if your pain feels worse for a few days as this sometimes happens. Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal and this should settle down. Try to keep on the move about the house while avoiding anything too strenuous.

What should I do in the weeks after the injections?

As your pain decreases, you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming will help to improve your muscle tone. It is best to increase your activities gradually. If you are unsure, or finding exercises increasingly difficult, please contact your GP or Pain team and discuss a referral to physiotherapy.

What follow-up will be arranged?

You will receive a letter with a follow-up appointment date and time. It will either be a phone call with a specialist nurse or in clinic with a consultant. If you haven't heard from us within 10 weeks following the procedure please contact the department on 020 7188 4714, from 9am to 5pm, to talk to one of the nurses.

Is there anything else I need to consider before the procedure?

- Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading
- Always bring a list of all current medication
- Continue to take your medication as usual on the treatment day

Contact us

If you have a problem at home and you are worried about your condition please telephone the Day Surgery Unit on 020 7188 1738 at Guy's Hospital (7.30am to 7pm, Monday to Friday) or 020 7188 3222 at St Thomas' Hospital (7.30am to 8pm, Monday to Friday).

Alternatively you can contact the Pain Management Unit on 020 7188 4714 and talk to one of the specialist nurses (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

Before you go home you will be given information about who to contact if the Pain Unit is closed. **If you think it is an emergency, please go straight to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) or call 999.**

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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