

# Foot and ankle injections

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**This leaflet explains more about having a foot or ankle injection. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital.**

## What is a foot or ankle injection?

Your foot and ankle are made up of many different bones. They are connected to one another with ligaments (strong fibrous connective tissue) and meet each other at joints. For a variety of reasons, these structures and joints can wear down, become inflamed or injured and can be a cause of pain.

A foot or ankle injection delivers medicines into or near the painful area or joint. There are two medicines used in foot or ankle injections, you will receive a local anaesthesia and will also usually receive a corticosteroid:

- The local anaesthetic (bupivacaine) is used to block pain from the injected area.
- The corticosteroid (methylprednisolone acetate-Depo-Medrone) is used to reduce swelling and inflammation in the injected area.

The local anaesthetic injection gives immediate relief while the slower acting steroid injection takes effect.

Foot and ankle injections are normally performed under general anaesthetic (where you are asleep). Occasionally, they may be done using sedation; some sedation (relieves anxiety and helps you relax). If you are having a general anaesthetic or sedation, you will be able to discuss this with the anaesthetist before the treatment and they will identify the best method for you.

For more information about having an anaesthetic and sedation see our leaflet, **Having an anaesthetic** - please ask a member of staff for a copy.

## What are the benefits – why should I have a foot or ankle injection?

Foot and ankle injections are carried out for **diagnostic** or **therapeutic** purposes.

- A **diagnostic** injection may help your surgeon to plan the long term management of your condition. It is very useful when the source of your pain has not been clearly identified before, and can also determine which structure in your foot or ankle is causing your symptoms.
- A **therapeutic** injection aims to improve your symptoms with the use of local anaesthetic and steroids which reduce swelling and inflammation. This can be repeated periodically if it works well and will allow you to progress with other treatments. The aim of a successful foot or ankle injection is to ease your pain for up to a period of three months.

It is recommended that you keep a pain diary before and after the treatment - this will be discussed further in this leaflet.

## What are the risks?

Foot and ankle injections are commonly performed and are generally safe. Before suggesting the treatment, your doctor will have assessed that the benefits of the procedure outweigh any disadvantages. However, to make an informed decision and give your consent, you need to be aware of the possible side effects and risks/complications.

Generally, if complications occur at all they are usually mild and resolve within a few weeks

Rare complications include:

- **Increased pain in the treated area** (affects around 2 of every 100 patients treated): this is usually temporary and lasts a few hours to a few days. If you experience increased pain several days after the injections, please contact us as it may be a sign of infection.
- **Local skin and fat changes** (affects less than 1 in every 1000 patients): there may be skin discolouration or a small area of fat atrophy (wasting). This can leave a permanent cosmetic scar.
- **Infection** (affects around 1 in every 15,000 patients treated): the area may become infected and need antibiotics and possibly surgical drainage
- **Bleeding**: Very rarely bleeding and/or bruising in the injected area may occur. This may cause some increased pain for a few days.
- **An allergic reaction to the injection** (very rare): these will usually happen immediately and can be treated whilst you are in hospital so help is available. If you have any signs of an allergic reaction after you have left the hospital, please seek medical advice urgently.

Like all medicines, corticosteroids (methylprednisolone acetate) may cause side effects, although not everybody will experience them.

Some of the side effects you may have include hot flushes, feeling sick, mild abdominal pain, fluid retention, a temporary rise in blood sugar, and menstrual irregularities (in women). These should settle within a few days. Please seek medical advice if you experience severe side effects or if they do not settle after two days.

If you have diabetes and your blood glucose level is not very well controlled, please tell the person giving you the injection. After having the injection, you are advised to check your blood sugar levels more frequently that evening.

## Are there any alternatives?

Alternative therapies may include physiotherapy, the use of orthotics (shoe insoles), pain relieving medicines, or more extensive surgery. Your doctor will have discussed these options with you during your consultation.

## How can I prepare for a foot or ankle injection?

For information on how to prepare for your treatment please refer to the leaflet **Surgical Admissions Lounges (SAL) and Day Surgery Units (DSU) at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals** - please ask a member of staff for a copy or visit our website [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk).

It is also valuable to keep a pain diary to help your doctor assess your pain and effectiveness of the injection. Score your pain between zero and ten at the same time each day - zero being no pain and ten being excruciating. Do this for two weeks before your injection and six weeks after.

## Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves. If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

## What happens during the treatment?

On the day of your treatment, you will be seen by a surgeon who will ask you to sign a consent form if not already completed. The anaesthetist will also review your fitness for anaesthetic and finalise the planned anaesthetic regimen. You will then be taken to the operating theatre for your treatment.

The anaesthetist will inject a general anaesthetic or sedative into a vein in the back of your hand. Your surgeon will then carefully insert a thin, hollow needle into your foot or ankle using an X-ray machine for guidance. When the treatment is finished, the doctor will take the needle out and cover the injection site with a plaster. The treatment usually takes around 15 minutes.

## Will I feel any pain?

After the treatment, you may have some tenderness at the needle insertion site. This will normally last for a few hours. To reduce discomfort you can place an ice pack on the area, for no longer than 20 minutes at a time. Do not put ice directly on your skin as it can cause frostbite.

It is also common to have an increase in pain for the first 24 to 72 hours after the treatment. This occurs because the medicines are injected into an area where there is already inflammation. The local anaesthetic will keep you pain-free for a while so it is best to take things easy for the first 24 to 48 hours. You can continue to take your normal painkillers after your injection. Your symptoms should gradually improve in the days following your foot or ankle injection.

## **What happens after the treatment?**

After the treatment you will be taken to the recovery department. This is where you are monitored for the initial post-operative period. You will then be transferred to the discharge lounge. A nurse will make sure that you are safe to move around and that you have passed urine before going home. It is advised that you have someone (responsible adult) with you to accompany you home and stay with you for 24 hours.

## **What do I need to do after I go home?**

After 24 hours, the plaster can be removed and you can then have a bath or shower as normal. Generally, there are no restrictions following your foot or ankle injection once the post-treatment pain has settled down.

## **When can I resume work and exercise?**

Depending on the nature of your employment, you may wish to return to work after 48 hours. We also advise you to refrain from high impact exercise (for example running and squash) for 48 hours.



## What should I do if I have a problem?

Please contact your GP (including the out of hours service if required) if you experience any of the following:

- Excruciating pain unlike your normal symptoms
- Increasing redness, swelling or oozing around the injection site
- Fever (temperature higher than 38.5 C) or you feel very hot to touch.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will have a follow up appointment approximately three months after your treatment. We will send you an appointment letter but if you have not heard from us within four weeks after your discharge from hospital please contact us - details are at the end of this leaflet.

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## Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact the Orthopaedic Clinical Nurse Specialist on 020 71885 3474 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. If you have any urgent medical concerns out of hours, please contact your GP or attend your local A&E department.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://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](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust**

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

**t:** 0800 731 0319    **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)

**w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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