Cortisone Injections

Why are these procedures done?

Cortisone is a treatment for inflammation. Most literature on painful conditions of the spine and joints suggest that inflammation can be a key contributor to the pain in addition to ligament, tendon and cartilage damage. It is very important to note that these injections/procedures are almost NEVER a cure for the problem. These procedures are used as a tool to advance your therapy and exercise program. When you find your therapy or exercise program too painful – cortisone injections can be of great value in lessening the inflammation/pain to allow for more effective therapeutic intervention.

Possible side effects:

Cortisone or Steroid Flare Reaction - Sometimes people experience a delayed (within 24-48 hours), temporary (lasting 24-48 hours) increase in their pain. Icing can be helpful. You should not be concerned if you experience this side effect. It will not change the effectiveness of the shot.

Elevated Blood Pressure - Most commonly occurs in patients who are already hypertensive. This happens because of temporary fluid retention and may be accompanied by an increased swelling of the feet. This effect is temporary.

Elevated Blood Sugar - Most commonly seen in diabetic patients. Patients with diabetes should carefully monitor their blood sugar as cortisone can cause a temporary rise in glucose levels. If you take insulin you should be especially careful. Check your blood sugar often and adjust the insulin doses if necessary.

Facial Flushing - A flushing sensation and redness of the face. This reaction is more common in women and is seen in up to 15 percent of patients. This can begin within a few hours of the injection and may last for a few days.

Infection, Bleeding and Allergic reaction - Any and all injections carry the risk of infection, bleeding and allergic reaction. Precautions are taken to minimize these risks. Tell your doctor if you have a tendency to bleed, or if you have had any kind of reaction to this type of injection in the past.

Skin Pigment Changes - Patients with darker skin should also be aware that cortisone may cause skin around the injection site to lighten. This is not harmful.

Loss of Fatty Tissue - High doses of cortisone can have detrimental effects on some tissues in the body. When injected into fatty tissue, cortisone can lead to a problem called fat atrophy. Fat atrophy causes loss of fatty tissue, which can lead to dimpling of the skin or the thinning out of fat. Patients who get cortisone injections in the heel to treat plantar fasciitis may find walking painful as fat that usually cushions their steps may thin out.
Stomach Upset – Cortisone injections can cause stomach upset for a few days. Some people also experience hiccups.

Tendon Rupture - Cortisone can also cause weakening of tendons even tendon rupture. This is one reason your doctor may limit the number of cortisone injections administered.

Are cortisone injections safe?

Cortisone injections are extremely safe, but they do still carry potential problems. If you are concerned about having a cortisone shot, talk with your doctor. While cortisone is a powerful treatment for many orthopedic conditions, there are usually other options that can also be tried.

Can I get a cortisone injection more than once?

Yes. There is no rule as to how many cortisone injections can be given. Often physicians do not want to give more than three, but there is not really a specific limit to the number of shots. However, there are some practical limitations. If a cortisone injection wears off quickly or does not help the problem, then repeating it may not be worthwhile. Also, animal studies have shown effects of weakening of tendons and softening of cartilage with cortisone injections. Repeated cortisone injections multiply these effects and increase the risk of potential problems. This is the reason many physicians limit the number of injections they offer to a patient.