

Cortisone Injection

What is cortisone?

Cortisone is in a family of medications called corticosteroids, which are strong anti-inflammatory drugs. Corticosteroids are used for many conditions. They can be taken by mouth or in a variety of other ways including creams, inhalers, or injections (shots).

Corticosteroids are not the same as anabolic steroids. Because they have a similar name, they are sometimes confused. Anabolic steroids are a group of drugs that increase muscle mass and strength and are often used illegally by athletes and can have many harmful side effects.

What is a cortisone injection used for?

A cortisone shot is often used to reduce inflammation (swelling, pain) of a bursa, joint, or tendon in a specific area of the body such as the knee, elbow, or shoulder. Reducing the swelling helps relieve pain and discomfort and can speed up recovery from an injury.

A shot of cortisone may also be given to reduce inflammation over the whole body (for example, if you have an allergic reaction or a flare-up of rheumatoid arthritis).

How is the shot given?

The corticosteroid medicine is usually mixed with a local anesthetic and then injected into the injured area. At first, the shot may feel uncomfortable, but the local anesthetic will help with the discomfort.

What happens after I get the shot?

When the anesthetic wears off, the area where the shot was given may be quite sore. Your health care providers recommend putting an ice bag on the area for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours after the shot and taking an anti-inflammatory medicine (such as

ibuprofen). The cortisone will start to reduce the inflammation and give you pain relief within 2 to 3 days. In some cases, the cortisone will permanently relieve your symptoms. In other cases, the pain relief is temporary and can last anywhere from a couple of weeks to years.

Many chronic (ongoing) inflammatory conditions are caused by overuse. If you continue activities that overuse the injured area, the inflammation may return and the cortisone shot will probably not help that much.

What are the risks?

Side effects from cortisone shots are rare. Possible side effects at the site where the shot was given include:

- ▶ slight discoloration of the skin
- ▶ shrinkage of the fatty tissue beneath where the shot was given
- ▶ pain
- ▶ infection
- ▶ weakening of the tendons or tendon rupture.

Loss of bone calcification (osteoporosis) or a loss of bone calcification in a joint (a vascular necrosis) are very uncommon side effects and usually occur only after having many cortisone shots.

Diabetics may have a temporary increase in their blood sugar after a shot.

Cortisone can temporarily weaken the immune system. While receiving these shots, you should not get certain vaccines. Also, avoid contact with anyone who has chickenpox or measles, especially if you have never had these diseases. Your immune system may not be strong enough to fight off the infection while you are taking cortisone.