

Bay Area Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine

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JOINT INJECTIONS

Injection of medication into a joint can be a rapid and safe way to obtain relief from many types of joint problems. Injections allow the physician to put the therapeutic agent directly at the site of the disease and avoid some of the potential systemic toxicities of that medication in large part.

Side Effects:

Corticosteroids have some potential side effects:

- Increased pain during the first few days after an injection.
- Tendon degeneration and scarring, causing loss of strength and movement.
- Skin color (pigmentation) changes.
- Dimpling of the skin (subcutaneous atrophy).
- Infection at the injection site.
- Elevated blood sugar levels if you have diabetes.

Corticosteroid injections should not be given frequently (usually no more than a total of 3 injections over 12 months) because of the potential side effects.

Injection Procedure:

After cleaning the skin, the medical practitioner may use a cold spray to decrease the sensation of the puncture. The needles that are inserted into the joint are similar to those used to draw blood from a vein. Some momentary pain may be produced but this is minimal if the joint can be relaxed.

Which joints are most often injected?

Some joints are more easily injected than others. Knees typically are most often treated. Other commonly injected joints include the shoulder, ankle, elbow, wrist, thumb and small joints of the hands and feet. Relatively less accessible joints such as hips may be done under X-ray or ultrasound guidance.

What medications are injected?

Most often the medication used will be a corticosteroid prepared in a form that will primarily stay in the joint. Such injections are given to suppress the pain in that joint for many different kinds of arthritis – [osteoarthritis](#), [rheumatoid arthritis](#), [gout](#) or [pseudogout](#). The benefit can last for months or can be the only treatment required if the joint swelling was from a minor injury that will not recur.

Another type of injection may be a preparation of hyaluronic acid which is approved for use only in osteoarthritis and can give relief of 6-12 months duration when it is effective. It is administered over the course of 3-5 injections per site. Please see www.bayareaorthosurgery.com for further information regarding hyaluronic acid (viscosupplementation) injections.

When should injections not be given?

The most common reasons for not performing a joint injection are the presence of an infection in or around a joint, or if the patient has a serious allergy to one or more of the medications injected into a joint.