

STEROID (CORTISONE) INJECTIONS

Your doctor has recommended a steroid (cortisone) injection. Steroid injections are a common and very effective treatment for conditions in which inflammation causes pain.

There are different types of steroids. One type is used illegally by bodybuilders. It is called an anabolic steroid.

The other type of steroids are called glucocorticoids. They are produced naturally in your body by your adrenal glands and help to reduce inflammation in the body. Prednisone, cortisone, Depomedrol and betamethasone are all different kinds of glucocorticoids. The glucocorticoids were first discovered at the Mayo Clinic in the 1930's. They act to reduce swelling and to cool or heal inflammation.

The glucocorticoids can be administered in various ways. Cortisone creams work locally on the skin. Oral pills act systemically (throughout the whole body system). Injections have the advantage of placing the medication precisely at the site of inflammation. This allows a much lower dose of the medication to work more effectively.

SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects are more common with chronic (every day) use of oral steroid pills because the bloodstream carries the medicine to all parts of the body. These side effects may include weight gain, diabetes, osteoporosis, cataracts, increased risk of infection and stomach problems.

The injectable steroids are unlikely to cause side effects unless they are given in high doses or are given frequently over a prolonged period of time. Because of this, most injection specialists generally don't recommend having more than 3 or 4 steroid injections a year in a particular area.

DEPOMEDROL, BETAMETHASONE

Depomedrol (methylprednisolone) and betamethasone are the two glucocorticoids used in our clinic. They are both sustained-release, deposit-type synthetic cortisones. Because of its chemical makeup, each tends to stay where it is injected, slowly releasing the anti-inflammatory effect over a week or two. These two glucocorticoids have been used safely for many years.

If necessary, one, two or three injections are usually tried over the space of several weeks. After that, in an effort to avoid the risk of side effects, no more injections are generally advised for at least six months.

Please don't hesitate to ask your doctor if you have any questions regarding the use of steroids.