



Banff Sport Medicine

Cortisone Injections

What is a cortisone injection?

Scan the QR code to watch a short video about cortisone injections, including tips on post-injection care.



Cortisone injections are used to help reduce pain and swelling in soft tissues and joints. They are especially helpful during “flare-ups” when symptoms suddenly get worse. These injections contain corticosteroids, which work by calming the body’s immune response in the affected area. The anti-inflammatory effect of the injection should begin to relieve symptoms rapidly, often within 48 hours. Cortisone injections usually provide temporary relief that can last from 6 weeks to 6 months, but the effects can vary from person to person and depend on the area.

Why get a cortisone injection:

- Cortisone injections are used to treat inflammation in various tissues and joints, including certain types of arthritis, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, tennis elbow, and bursitis.
- If you are experiencing inflammation or related symptoms, consult your doctor to determine if a cortisone injection is a suitable treatment option.

What to know before considering a cortisone injection

- **Cost Information:** The injection procedure is covered by Alberta Health Care; however, the injection product is not covered. You are allowed to:
 - Bring your own injection by obtaining a prescription, or we can supply the product for you. A receipt and prescription can be provided by our clinic in the event the cost is covered by your supplementary health insurance plan.
- **Blood thinners:** Discuss with your doctor if you are taking any blood thinners (e.g. aspirin, anticoagulants), as it may be recommended to avoid them or lower the dose if possible.
- **Allergies:** Inform your doctor of any allergies, especially if you have reacted to cortisone or local anesthetics in the past.
- **Infection:** Do not get a cortisone injection if you have an infection anywhere in your body. Corticosteroids can temporarily suppress the immune system, making it harder to fight off infection.
- **What to expect at a cortisone injection appointment:** On the day of your appointment, please wear comfortable clothing (t-shirt, shorts), that allows easy access to the injection site. Plan to arrive about 10 minutes early to complete the check-in process. While the injection itself only takes a few minutes, most appointments typically last between 15 and 30 minutes.

Post injection care & expectations

It is normal to experience temporary pain, swelling, stiffness, warmth, redness, or localized discoloration around the injected area for three to seven days. During the first week, post-injection care should include:

- **Rest:** Protect the injected area for one to two days, avoid heavy lifting or intense physical activity for 10–14 days after the injection.
- **Ice:** Ice wrapped in a towel (do not apply directly to skin) can be applied to the injected area for 15-20 minutes 2-3 times a day for the first 24-48 hours to help with the initial swelling, pain, and stiffness.
- **Over the counter medication:** Use over-the-counter medication like Acetaminophen (Tylenol®), acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin) or ibuprofen (Advil) to manage pain and inflammation.
- **Avoid heat:** Avoid having a hot bath, using a hot tub, or a heating pad on the area for the first 2-3 days following an injection. Showering is completely ok.

- **Strengthening the area:** Once initial symptoms have settled, it is very important to strengthen the surrounding muscles before returning to physical activity.

What about additional injections?

- **Same body part:** There is a strict rule to wait at least 3-months between cortisone shots into the same tissue/joint. This is because too many cortisone shots in one area can increase the risk of tendon weakness and, in some cases, cartilage damage. Discuss with your doctor if additional injections would be beneficial.
- **Injections in different areas:** There is no strict limit on receiving cortisone injections in different parts of the body. However, it's important to consult your physician to determine whether a cortisone injection is appropriate for your specific condition.

Risks of cortisone injections

Post-injection flare (around 1 in 100 people)

- This is a relatively uncommon reaction to a cortisone injection. Effects of a post-injection flare are very similar to an infection (pain, redness, warmth), except that symptoms begin in the first 24 hours after the injection. Post-injection flares typically last 2-3 days and are more common in younger patients.
- Icing the area for up to 20 minutes at a time using an ice pack wrapped in a towel can be helpful; do not apply ice directly to your skin. Some patients also choose to take a pain reliever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or an anti-inflammatory such as acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- If the post-injection flares persists longer than 5 days, make sure you notify your doctor.

Infections (1 in 10,000 injections)

- The risk of infection is extremely low. Symptoms of infection include fever, chills, pain, warmth and redness around the area. Symptoms can occur up to 10 days after the injection.
- Joint infections may be more likely if you have pre-existing conditions that increase the risk such as alcoholism, diabetes, drug abuse, or rheumatoid arthritis.
- If you have any of these symptoms please call our office, the Banff Mineral Springs Hospital, or go to the nearest urgent care or emergency clinic and tell them that you had a cortisone injection.

Allergic reaction

- Some individuals may experience a reaction to the cortisone preparation or the local anesthetic. Symptoms range from rash, itching, and hives to more severe cases like difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- Always inform your doctor beforehand if you have a history of reactions cortisone or local anesthetics.
- If you experience severe allergy symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.

Osteoarthritis progression & cartilage damage

- Cortisone injections offer short-term relief for osteoarthritis. However, multiple injections in the same joint are associated with an increased risk of osteoarthritis progression.

Weakened tendons

- After an injection of cortisone close to a tendon, the tendons can be temporarily weakened and there is a risk of tendon rupture. Multiple injections in the same area further increase the risk of tendon weakening and rupture.
- Allow full rest for the 1-2 days following injections. It is recommended to avoid heavy lifting/intense activity for 10-14 days following injection.

Corticosteroid-induced myopathy: muscle weakness

- Long term muscle weakness from intra-articular cortisone injections is very rare, with only a few reported cases. Those with a history of high-dose glucocorticoid usage (e.g. prednisone, prednisolone or dexamethasone) may be at higher risk.

Increased blood sugar levels

- Cortisone injections can temporarily raise blood sugar. For those with diabetes or high blood sugar, it is important to monitor blood sugar levels more often for a few days following the injection.

Other adverse effects

- Other potential short- and long-term adverse effects include but are not limited to: bleeding, facial flush, skin atrophy and pigment changes, nerve or blood vessel injury, increased blood sugar, as well as bone and immune system effects.