

Corticosteroid Injection – Side Effects



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Cortisone is neither a pain medication nor an anesthetic. It is an anti-inflammatory drug. It is a compound similar to what the body normally produces at times of stress, except longer-lasting. Cortisone helps the body recover. Injectable cortisone is synthetically produced and has many different trade names. Here, at Inland Pain Medicine, we use Betamethasone.

Cortisone is more likely to cause problems when it is used chronically, such as for treating rheumatoid arthritis or for asthma. A short series of epidural steroid injections rarely causes problems. An injection into the joint allows the physician to use high doses of corticosteroids directly at the site of inflammation. Since these injections are localized, the rest of the body is spared the high concentration of the drug.

Side effects from steroid injections occur rarely, but should be discussed. These include:

- *Infection*: Very unusual (less than 0.5%), and usually is avoided by using a sterile technique. We avoid administering injections to those with active infections.
- *Bleeding*: Also unusual. Avoided by not performing this procedure on patients with bleeding disorders or those on blood thinning medication such as Coumadin and anti-inflammatories.
- *Dural tears*: Caused by piercing the sac around the spinal nerves, the *dura mater*, with the needle. This may result in a headache, known as a postdural puncture headache. Once recognized, this is simply repaired and heals uneventfully. A dural tear will occur most commonly in obstetric patients receiving an epidural for pain relief.
- *Increased blood sugar*: Diabetics must carefully monitor their blood sugar following any steroid injection

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