

Cortisone/Steroid Injections

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Cortisone shots are injections that may help relieve pain and inflammation in a specific area of your body. Cortisone shots are most commonly given into joints — such as your ankle, elbow, hip, knee, shoulder, spine and wrist. Even the small joints in your hands and feet may benefit from cortisone shots. Cortisone shots usually include a corticosteroid medication and a local anesthetic. In many cases, cortisone shots can be administered in your doctor's office. However, the number of cortisone shots you can receive in one year generally is limited because of potential side effects from the medication.

Risks

Cortisone shots carry a risk of complications, such as:

- Death of nearby bone (osteonecrosis)
- Joint infection
- Nerve damage
- Thinning of skin and soft tissue around the injection site
- Temporary flare of pain and inflammation in the joint
- Tendon weakening or rupture
- Thinning of nearby bone (osteoporosis)
- Whitening or lightening of the skin around the injection site

Limits on the number of cortisone shots

There's some concern that repeated use of cortisone shots may cause deterioration of the cartilage within a joint. For this reason, doctors typically limit the number of cortisone shots into a joint. In general, cortisone injections should not be given more often than every six weeks and usually not more than three or four times a year. If you take blood thinners, you may need to stop taking these medications for several days before your cortisone shot, to reduce your risk of bleeding or bruising.

Some dietary supplements also have a blood-thinning effect. Your family doctor can help coordinate what medications and supplements you should avoid before your cortisone shot.

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