

Steroid Injections

Steroid injections can be used to treat some problems in the arm and hand. These can include trigger fingers, tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, arthritis, tennis elbow and rotator cuff tendonitis. These injections usually contain cortisone and a numbing medicine.

Cortisone is a steroid normally produced by your body, and it is a powerful anti-inflammatory. Corticosteroids tend to shrink, thin and slow things down. These steroids are different from anabolic steroids, which have been abused by athletes to build muscle and enhance performance.

Results

The injection should take effect within a few days, and the benefits can last for many weeks; however, results are not the same for everyone or every problem. For some conditions, one injection solves the problem. For others, several injections may be required. There is no set rule as to how many injections a person can get. Your doctor might limit the number of injections because repeated cortisone can damage tendons and/or cartilage.

Side Effects

The most common side effect of steroid injections is known as a "flare." This pain is felt for one or two days after the injection. It can be treated with ice and by resting the area injected.

Other side effects might include:

- A rise in blood sugar level for diabetic patients for about five days
- Thinning of the skin
- "Lightening" of the skin at injection site (more common in patients with dark skin)
- Weakening of tendons, making them more likely to rupture
- Allergic reactions (rare)

One of the rare but more serious problems is an infection, especially if the injection was given into a joint. If you notice redness, extreme pain or heat at the injection site, or if you have a fever greater than 101° after an injection, you should call your doctor.

