

Pain Relief Unit

# A guide to trigger point injections

Information for patients



This information leaflet will help you to understand more about trigger point injections. If you have any further questions or if there is anything you do not understand, please feel free to ask any of the nurses or your doctor at the Pain Relief Unit.

## What is a trigger point?

A trigger point can be described as a painful, irritable knot or tight band in the muscle. It can usually be felt under the skin and may twitch when touched. It may irritate the surrounding nerves and cause pain in that area of the body.

## What is a trigger point injection?

It is usually an injection of local anaesthetic or a combination of local anaesthetic and steroid into the painful knot or band of tight muscle. It is performed by the doctor to try to give you some relief from pain.

## How is the injection given?

These injections are given in the treatment room. Before you go into the treatment room you will have your blood pressure taken and you will be asked to change into a gown.

In the treatment room the area of your skin that is causing you pain will be exposed and your skin will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution to reduce the risk of infection.

The doctor may ask you to tell him/her if you think the injection is going into the right spot where your pain is coming from.

## What happens first?

Before the injection you will need to let the doctor or nurse know:

- if you are allergic to anything, e.g. local anaesthetic, steroids, iodine or sticking plasters
- if you are taking or have recently taken antibiotics for an infection
- if you are taking any medicines to thin your blood such as Warfarin, Aspirin, Ticlopidine, Sinthron or Clopidogrel
- if you feel unwell on the day
- if you have any other serious medical conditions.

## What will I feel during the procedure?

You may feel the needle going through the skin and some pressure when the medicine is injected. In most cases the local anaesthetic will numb the area and give some immediate relief.

## How long will it take?

This varies from person to person but it usually takes about 10-15 minutes for the whole procedure.

## What happens afterwards?

After the injection the nurse will apply a dressing and then help you into a wheelchair. The nurse will then take you to the recovery room where we advise you to rest for at least 30 minutes. Occasionally patients need to lie down for a short while. You will be offered a drink before you go home. **You must not drive afterwards so you will need to arrange for someone to drive you home.**

## What will happen to my pain?

Usually your pain will improve in the first few hours after the injection of local anaesthetic. Your pain may return after the local anaesthetic has worn off and there may be some additional soreness as a result of the injection.

The steroid can take up to two weeks to work or it may not work at all. If it is going to work the effects can last for several weeks or months. Each person responds differently to the injections and the effect will not be known until you have had the injection.

## What are the risks and side effects?

Trigger point injections using a steroid are not usually given more than three times a year in order to avoid potential side effects that can occur from steroids. These include:

- an increased risk of infection for a while after the injection
- raised blood sugars in diabetic patients
- an increased appetite and possible weight gain
- dimpling of the skin at the site of the injection.

There are some risks that do need to be mentioned but they do not happen very often. These include:

- feeling dizzy
- bleeding
- infection at the injection site
- an increase in pain
- an allergic reaction to the medicine.

## What happens next?

You will usually be sent or given another appointment for a repeat injection in about 4-6 months time. You will also be contacted by a nurse after 3 months to ask how effective the injection has been. It is useful to make a note of when the pain starts to return as this is a question the nurse will ask you when she/he contacts you.

## Do I need to rest when I get home?

On the day of treatment you may want to rest when you get home or you can continue as normal if you feel well enough. You can drive the following day. If your pain improves then you should slowly build up your activity and exercise. However, pain is best managed by keeping active within your own limits.

## How do I get advice once I get home if I need it?

If you have any non-urgent questions please feel free to leave a message on the Pain Team's voicemail advice line and a nurse will get back to you within 7 days.

### **Advice line for the Pain Relief Unit nursing staff:**

Voicemail Tel: **01865 857107**

If you have any urgent problems, please contact your GP.



If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

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