

Fluoroscopic Injections

For chronic spine, leg and arm pain

Fluoroscopy is the examination of tissues and other body structures by X-ray. The X-ray used in fluoroscopy shows, like a video, a continuous three-dimensional image of a particular area of the body. This differs from a traditional X-ray that, like a photograph, allows for only one still image of the affected area. For patients who need a fluoroscopically guided injection, the continuous X-ray is used to determine the proper placement of the injection.

What are fluoroscopically guided injections?

Fluoroscopically guided steroid injections are typically used to alleviate chronic spine, leg or arm pain. Steroids (cortisone) have been shown to reduce inflammation and pain, while allowing patients to participate in a more demanding rehabilitation program. While the effects of the injection tend to be temporary — providing pain relief for one week to one year — a steroid injection can be highly effective because it delivers the medication directly to the site of inflammation.

Who performs the procedure?

A physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist performs the injection under X-ray guidance using a fluoroscope. The fluoroscope is a machine that provides a continuous three-dimensional image of the area and allows for safe and accurate placement of the medication. Most procedures are done with local anesthesia, usually lidocaine, and a small amount of contrast material is generally used to ensure appropriate placement of the medication.

Types of injections

Common types of injections include epidural, facet, hip and sacroiliac joint injections. Epidural steroid injections deliver steroids directly into the epidural space, which surrounds the spinal nerves. Steroids can also be injected directly into the space that surrounds such joints as the facet joint, hip joint and sacroiliac joint.

When to consider a fluoroscopically guided injection

Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and conduct a physical examination of the affected area. Diagnostic studies, such as an X-ray, MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and an EMG (electromyogram) may also be required.

Some patients may benefit from home exercise, physical therapy or prescribed medications. If those treatments are ineffective, a fluoroscopically guided injection may be considered.

Preparing for the injection

Prior to the injection, patients receive detailed instructions on how to prepare for the procedure. These instructions include specific information about when to stop taking certain medications and any precautions that need to be taken due to allergies.

Allergic reactions

This procedure involves injecting an X-ray contrast that may cause an allergic reaction in some people. **Patients who are allergic to shellfish, iodine or contrast dyes used for X-ray studies — including IVP dye — will need to notify the physician.** Precautions will be taken to prevent a reaction from occurring during the procedure.

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Post-injection recovery

Following the injection, patients remain in recovery for 10 minutes to ensure there are no post-injection complications or reactions to the medications. The medication should take effect within one to five days. Patients should refrain from strenuous physical activity and submerging the injection site in water for 24 hours following the injection.

Are there risks associated with these injections?

In general, fluoroscopically guided injection procedures are very safe and complications are rare. The most common complications are local tenderness or an increase in pain at the injection site. Rare complications include infection, nerve injury, spinal headache or allergic reaction. If symptoms become severe or the patient experiences burning, numbness or weakness in the extremities, he or she must go to the nearest hospital's emergency room. Serious complications of stroke, paralysis and death have been reported but are extremely rare.

Learn More

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