

# What to Expect: Knee Steroid Injection

## Before the injection

- **Reason for injection:** Most commonly used for knee osteoarthritis, inflammatory arthritis, or a flare of pain/swelling.
  - **Medications:** Tell your provider if you take blood thinners, have diabetes, or have a history of joint infection.
  - **No major prep:** You usually don't need to fast or stop normal activities beforehand unless told otherwise.
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## During the procedure (usually 5–10 minutes)

1. **Positioning:** You'll sit with your knee bent or lay flat.
  2. **Skin cleaning:** The area is cleaned thoroughly to prevent infection.
  3. **Local anesthetic:**
    - Often included in the injection (e.g., lidocaine).
    - You may feel a **brief pinch or pressure**.
  4. **The injection:**
    - Some people feel pressure or fullness in the knee.
    - Discomfort is usually brief.
  5. **Ultrasound guidance:** Sometimes used to improve accuracy, especially if fluid is present. You may be asked to lay down if the ultrasound is needed.
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## Immediately after

- **Temporary numbness or heaviness** in the knee from the anesthetic (lasts a few hours).
  - **Pain relief may start right away**, but this early relief is from the anesthetic—not the steroid.
  - You'll usually be observed briefly, then can go home.
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## The first 24–72 hours

- **Steroid flare:**
    - Up to ~10% of people experience **increased pain and swelling** within 1–2 days.
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- This usually resolves within 48–72 hours.
  - **Activity:**
    - Light activity is fine.
    - Avoid intense exercise, squatting, or long walks for about **48 hours**.
  - **Ice:** Helpful if sore (15–20 minutes at a time).
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#### When pain relief kicks in

- **Steroid effect:** Typically begins **2–5 days** after injection.
  - **Peak benefit:** Often around **1–2 weeks**.
  - **Duration of relief:**
    - Varies widely: **weeks to several months**.
    - Some people get significant relief; others only mild or temporary improvement.
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#### Possible side effects (usually mild)

##### **Common**

- Temporary pain or swelling
- Warmth or redness around the knee
- Facial flushing (1–2 days)

##### **Less common**

- Temporary rise in blood sugar (important if you have diabetes)
- Skin thinning or lightening at the injection site
- Mood or sleep changes for a day or two

##### **Rare but serious — call your doctor urgently if you notice:**

- Increasing pain, redness, warmth, fever (possible infection)
  - Severe swelling that doesn't improve
  - Inability to bear weight
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#### How often can you get them?

- Most clinicians limit to **no more than 3–4 injections per year in the same knee**.
- Repeated injections too frequently may contribute to cartilage damage over time.
- Dr. Payne recommends **waiting 3 months from the time of the injection until total joint replacement** due to increased risk of infection

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Tips to maximize benefit

- Combine the injection with **physical therapy, strengthening, weight management, or activity modification.**
- Use the pain relief window to improve knee strength and mobility.