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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.

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.

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.

The first 24–72 hours

- **Steroid flare:**
 - Up to ~10% of people experience **increased pain and swelling** within 1–2 days.
 - 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).

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.

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

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

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.