

Joint Pain

Why Do Joints Hurt?

The joints of the body are exposed to wear and tear every day, and over time this cumulative stress can result in the development of a painful condition known as arthritis. Symptoms of arthritis include joint pain and swelling, decreased range of motion, clicking and grinding, and morning stiffness.

When we are born, we have healthy cartilage within each joint that helps to reduce friction and absorb shock, allowing for easy range motion. With the onset of arthritis, there is degradation of the cartilage found within the joints, often accompanied by painful inflammation. Cartilage degradation is often worse with age, and can also worsen following trauma or injury to the joints.

What is a joint injection?

A joint injection is a non-surgical treatment approach to help patients who suffer from painful joints. The procedure involves the placement of a small needle to administer medication (different medications below) directly to the joints. The most common joint injections are for:

- **Hip**
- **Shoulder**
- **Knee**

How is Joint Injection performed?

The injection can be performed using fluoroscopic or ultrasound guidance:

Fluoroscopy:

This is a low-dose X-ray that can be utilized during the procedure. It will give your physician a series of real-time images that allows proper needle placement into the joint and avoidance of injury to the surrounding tissues. After the needle is placed, a small amount of contrast is usually injected to ensure the accurate placement of the needle. Once the location is confirmed, medication will be injected into the bursa—usually a mixture of a local anesthetic and a corticosteroid medication, which will reduce inflammation within the painful joint.

Ultrasound:

Ultrasound can also be utilized to guide the needle into the proper location and help to avoid tissue injury. After cleaning the area, your physician will place a small amount of cold ultrasound gel onto the overlying skin. Your physician will then apply an ultrasound probe to scan the area, assessing the surrounding anatomy and also locating the specific joint to be injected. Once the appropriate location is identified, a mixture of a local anesthetic and a corticosteroid medication will be injected into the joint space.

Medications:

For most patients, a combination of steroid and local anesthetic will decrease inflammation in the joint and provide several months of pain relief. Sometimes, a **lubricating gel**, such as **Synvisc**, can be injected into the joint instead. This will serve to supplement the fluid in the joint, helping to lubricate and cushion the joint.

Risk and Complications of Joint Injections

In general, joint injections are considered to be very safe. Other complications are bleeding, infection, nerve injury, and allergic reaction. There may also be pain, bleeding, or bruising at the site of needle entry. In some cases, there may be worsening or no improvement of your pain. Through the use of image guidance and sterile technique, we will take every measure to minimize these potential risks and maximize the therapeutic benefit.