

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY OF CRITICALLY APPRAISED TOPIC

Title: Corticosteroid injections for lower back pain: do they work?

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Lower back pain is one of the most common medical problems in the United States. Back pain can range from being mild to being debilitating. There are many causes of back pain. Back pain is often the result of muscle, nerve or bone injury. The injury can be the result of trauma, infection or cancer. Trauma is the most common cause of back pain because it is so easy to damage the back.

Most back pain can be managed without a doctor. Rest, heat and aspirin will help most back pain. If your pain continues after 2-4 weeks, you should go see your doctor. Some “warning symptoms” with back pain include fever, weight loss, limb numbness or tingling and incontinence. If you have any of these symptoms, you should make an appointment with your doctor right away. Tell your doctor if you have any of these symptoms because they can indicate infection, cancer or nerve compression.

When you go see your doctor he or she will examine your back. Your doctor will also take a look at how well your muscles and nerves work. They may also run some blood tests or get a picture of your back. Treatment for most back pain will often include aspirin, muscle relaxants, creams and physical therapy.

You may have heard of people getting steroid injections to help with knee or wrist pain. Steroid injections work by decreasing swelling and irritation in the body. A doctor does steroid injections. They cannot be done at home. You may be wondering, “Would steroid injections help my back pain?” Many studies have been

done, and the jury is still out as to whether steroid injections work for back pain or not. They may work for some people and they may not work for others. Because of the risk of serious side effects such as paralysis, they should only be used on a case-by-case basis. In fact, it has been shown that aspirin works just as well as injections!

Know that if you have back pain, you are not alone. You don't need to suffer silently with your pain. Work with your doctor to find a plan that works for you.

Resources for further reading

Low Back Pain Fact Sheet

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/backpain/detail_backpain.htm

Medline Back Pain

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/backpain.html>

Mayo Clinic Back Pain

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/back-pain/DS00171>

Resources for support

American Pain Foundation

<http://www.painfoundation.org/>

Back Pain Support Message Board

<http://www.backpainsupportgroup.com/>

Key Words:

Back

Lumbar

Pain

Steroid

Injection

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