

Sterile water injections (maternity only)

Information for service users

This leaflet provides information about the use of sterile water injections to treat back pain during labour. It includes information about why sterile water injections might be offered to you, whether they are suitable for you, and what to expect during the procedure. If you have more questions at any time, please do not hesitate to contact a member of staff.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your name and date of birth and check your ID band. If you do not have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address. If we do not ask these questions, then please ask us to check. Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

Back pain in labour is quite common. It can be caused by the baby lying in a posterior ('back to back') position, and is often continuous, whereas contraction pain comes and goes.

You may find massage, TENS machines, water, or adopting different positions help to reduce the pain. However, if these methods are not effective and your labour is otherwise uncomplicated, sterile water injections may reduce your back pain and make you more comfortable during your labour.

What are sterile water injections?

Sterile water injections (SWI) are a simple, safe procedure where tiny amounts of sterile water are injected under the skin at four points on your lower back. The injections are usually given by two midwives at the same time. They cause an intense stinging sensation, which lasts about 30 seconds. After this, you will usually feel relief from back pain.

How do sterile water injections work?

SWI works based on the 'gate control theory', which suggests that sterile water injections block pain receptors in the back, reducing pain perception. Used since the 1980s in countries like Sweden, Canada, and Australia, it has recently been recommended by UK national guidelines (NICE 2019). Research shows SWI can effectively relieve moderate to severe back pain in 80 to 90% of people, with relief lasting 30 minutes to two hours. While research is limited, many parents and midwives report positive outcomes.

Are there any risks?

There have been no reports of bad side effects from SWI, apart from the initial stinging sensation when the injections are given. SWI does not affect your baby.

You cannot have SWI if you already have an epidural during labour, but you are able to have an epidural at any point after being treated with SWI.

What are the benefits?

Some of the advantages of SWI in labour are:

- rapid relief from back pain
- it will not make you drowsy or limit your ability to stay mobile
- it is a simple, quick procedure that can be repeated as needed
- it does not restrict your choice of other methods of pain relief
- no side effects for baby

Consent

We must by law obtain your consent to any procedures beforehand. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to give consent to a procedure. If you are unsure about any aspect of the treatment proposed, please do not hesitate to ask to speak with a senior member of staff.

How are sterile water injections given?

Your midwife will assess if SWI is suitable for you. SWI is most effective for moderate to severe lower back pain.

During the procedure:

- your midwife will identify and mark four points on your lower back
- two pairs of injections of a tiny amount of sterile water will be injected just beneath the skin – they can be given between or with contractions
- this will leave a small blister at each site, which will feel like a wasp sting for 20 to 30 seconds
- the stinging will wear off and you should begin to feel relief from the back pain within one to three minutes.

It is very important that you do not rub or touch the injection sites for 30 minutes after, as that would interfere with the effectiveness of the injections.

Your midwife will monitor the effectiveness of your SWI treatment. You may have repeat injections if you need them, with or without other methods of pain relief.

Who to contact

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your midwife for further information. Their details can be found at the back of your handheld notes.

MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.mychart@nhs.net. Visit www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart to find out more.

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit www.kch.nhs.uk.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: kings.pals@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.access@nhs.net