

Intra-urethral Injections for Physical Stress Incontinence

Injection of synthetic materials into the urethra (the tube that leads from the bladder) may be used in the treatment of physical stress incontinence, particularly in women who have had previous unsuccessful surgery or those who are unfit for the standard operations.

The injections are usually performed under general or spinal anaesthesia; occasionally they are performed under local anaesthesia. The injection is administered through a cystoscope (a type of telescope used to inspect the interior of the bladder). As there are no surgical incisions and bladder emptying is usually normal almost immediately afterwards, these procedures are usually performed as day cases.

Up to 70 % of patients undergoing intra-urethral injection will experience a significant improvement in their continence in the months following the procedure; in up to 50 % of these, complete or near complete continence will be achieved. These improvements may be temporary and the procedure may need to be repeated for longer term benefit.

Apart from failure, complication rates are significantly lower than with standard operations and are usually very short-lived. Antibiotics are administered to minimise the risk of infection. Complications include:

- Pain passing urine
- Blood in the urine
- Urinary tract infection
- Difficulty in passing urine
- Damage to the urethra (very rare)