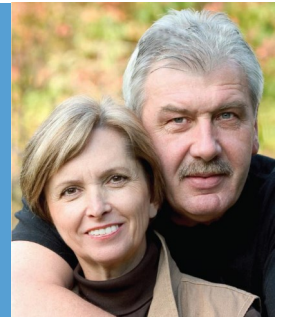


Pain Medicine Program

Facet Joint Injections

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What is a facet joint injection?

The facet joints are small joints at the back of the spine that support and aid in rotation and bending of the spine. These facet joints link the vertebrae of the spine together, so movement such as bending or twisting of the spine may cause pain. Sometimes the joints are inflamed because of either trauma or arthritis. The pain may be referred to the lower back and buttocks from a lumbar facet, or to the head and shoulders from a cervical facet problem. This may cause you to be unable to stand up straight, have stiffness, or have trouble getting out of a chair. The facet joints have small nerves that branch out from the spinal nerves that are affected by the trauma or inflammatory process.

What is the purpose of a facet joint injection?

The purpose of a facet joint block is twofold. First, it is used as a diagnostic block. If the patient has greater than 50% relief for two or more hours, there is an increased likelihood that the facet joint is a cause of the pain. If the injection helps for at least two hours, the doctor will usually repeat the injection to confirm the diagnosis. Secondly, the injection is used to reduce pain.

How is this procedure performed?

This procedure is performed with the patient lying on his stomach. The doctor may mark the skin with a marking pen to determine the area to be injected while looking at the spine under a fluoroscope. He will then use a local anesthetic to numb the skin prior to inserting the needles. A nurse checking your vital signs will monitor you during the procedure.

What medication is used for the injections?

The physician will use either lidocaine or bupivacaine (anesthetics or numbing agents) to numb the nerves around the facet joint. He may also use a corticosteroid agent to help reduce inflammation around the nerves.

How long will I get relief?

Relief may vary with each individual. The doctor does not expect that you will get permanent relief. The expected relief is several hours to several days.

What if I DO get temporary relief?

If you do get relief from the facet injections, the doctor may conclude that this is the cause of your pain. He may then elect to do a Radiofrequency lesioning of the nerves around the affected joints. This procedure will give much longer lasting relief of pain. You will receive a detailed explanation of that procedure if it is ordered by the doctor.

Is pain involved with this procedure?

This does involve placing needles in the skin, which can cause discomfort. You may feel some tingling and occasionally a jolting feeling during the procedure. You will have an IV access in your hand to receive some sedation, although you will not be “put to sleep”. It is important to communicate to the doctor about your painful areas during the procedure.

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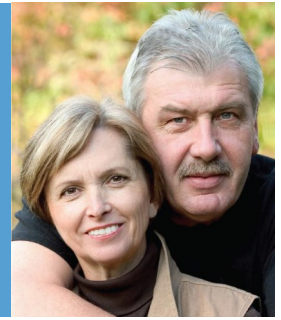
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Pain Medicine Program

Facet Joint Injections

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What should I do after the procedure?

If you received sedation, you must have a responsible adult driver to take you home. Even though you may feel alert, you should not drive for 24 hours. We advise you to go home the day of the procedure and rest. Take it easy for the first few days, performing the activities that you can tolerate. You may apply **ice** to your back for the first 24 hours to provide some pain relief and reduce swelling. Do not apply heat for the first 24 hours. After 24 hours, you may apply ice or heat as desired to decrease discomfort. Most people are able to return to work the following day.

What are the risks and possible side effects?

This is a safe procedure, although any procedure has risks. The risks depend on the area of the injection. As with any injection in the skin, infection could be a risk. This is why this is done under sterile conditions. Other risks could be bleeding, hematoma, bruising at the site of injection, or worsening of symptoms. Some people experience temporary decreased motor and sensory skills.

Is there anyone who should not consider this procedure?

If you are on a blood thinning medicine and have not stopped it prior to the procedure as directed by the clinic nurse, if you are on antibiotics for an infection, have an elevated temperature, or if you are ill on the day of the procedure, then the procedure will be rescheduled.

If you have further questions, we encourage you to call our office at 917-4500 and ask to speak with one of our nurses. We will be glad to answer all your questions and discuss any concerns you may have.