



Facet Joint Injection

What is a facet joint injection?

A facet joint injection is a procedure done to help relieve pain in the neck and lower back. The facet joints are paired structures located along the back of each vertebrae that allow your back and neck to be flexible and enable your spine to bend and twist. Your pain management doctor can evaluate your symptoms and decide if this procedure may be right for you.

How is the procedure performed?

The procedure is performed in an outpatient surgery center or hospital using x-ray imaging, or fluoroscopy. Your physician will decide which facet joints to inject based on the location of your pain and physical examination findings. You will be lying on your stomach with blankets covering you while the area for the block is cleaned with an antiseptic. Using the x-ray, the facet joints to inject are visualized. Your physician will use a local anesthetic or numbing medication to numb the skin over each facet joint. Once your skin is numb, the physician will direct a small needle into the joint capsule of the facet joint and inject a steroid and local anesthetic. The procedure usually takes less than 10 minutes.

How effective is a facet joint injection?

Due to the numbing medication injected, sometimes several hours of pain relief can be obtained immediately after the procedure. While the numbing medication only lasts a few hours, the steroid takes anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks to begin providing relief. It is the steroid which can provide long lasting relief. Sometimes the procedure provides long term relief but even if it only lasts a short time, the fact that it helped still provides your physician with diagnostic information he or she can use for future treatments. You may be a candidate for a nerve ablation or RFA if the relief is significant but short term.

What risks are involved with a facet joint injection?

The procedure is fairly low risk and usually is followed by a day of mild soreness at the injection sites. However, there are always potential risk when placing a needle in the body. These include bleeding, infection, allergic reaction, worsened pain, and seizure but these are very rare.

What happens after the injection?

Do not drive or perform any vigorous activity for 12-24 hours after the procedure. You can return to normal activities the following day. You will be able to resume your normal diet and medications. Your physician will schedule your follow up appointment.

Is a facet joint injection right for me?

If you have chronic neck or low back pain due to arthritis or acute spine pain after a trauma such as whiplash, facet joint injections may benefit you. Talk to your physician about your symptoms and he/she will help decide what is right for you.