

PATIENT INFORMATION FOR FACET JOINT INJECTION

Purpose of the Injection

The injection of a facet joint can have a dual purpose; it can be both diagnostic and therapeutic. Firstly, by injecting the local anesthetic into the facet joint, the amount of immediate pain relief experienced may help to confirm or rule out the joint as the source of pain. Secondly, the injection aims to reduce inflammation and / or swelling of the facet joint. Immediately after your injection, you may feel that your pain has reduced or gone altogether. This is due to the local anesthetic injected into the joint and may last for several hours. The cortisone that is also injected into the joint may take several days to start working and its effect may last several days to months. It is difficult to predict whether the injection will help you or not as occasionally these injections may not provide any significant medium to long term relief.

How is it performed?

Facet joint injections are a common procedure performed by a specialist radiologist. The procedure usually takes about 30 minutes (it may be longer). You will be required to lay very still on your stomach whilst we CT scan the affected area and prepare all the syringes required for the injection. The skin on your back around the affected area will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution and then injected with some local anesthetic. The local anesthetic injection may sting for about 10 seconds as the skin is numbed. Under the guidance of the CT scanner, the needle is positioned into the desired facet joint as requested by your referring doctor. Once the needle is in the correct position, a mixture of local anesthetic and cortisone will be injected into the facet joint and you may feel some momentary discomfort. At the conclusion of the procedure, we will place a band aid over the injection site which you should leave in place for the next 24 hours.

Risks associated with the procedure

Generally, facet joint injections are relatively safe procedures. However, as with any medical interventional procedure there are risks, side effects and the possibility of complications. The most common side effect is pain which is usually temporary. Other risks include but are not limited to; infection, bleeding, accidental damage to nearby structures (e.g. nerve, blood vessel or other organ), allergic reactions to the medications injected and post procedural bruising / soreness. Although extremely rare, injections around the spinal cord carry a very small risk of paralysis but this is very uncommon. It is strongly advised that you arrange for someone to accompany you home after the injection. Please DO NOT DRIVE YOURSELF HOME.

If you have any questions or concerns about this procedure, please direct any questions to the radiology staff who will attend to you prior to the commencement of the procedure.