



Facet Joint Injection Patient Education

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WHAT IS A FACET JOINT?

Facet joints are small joints in the back of the spine that form connections between each vertebra. Sometimes these joints can be painful. If these joints are blocked or anesthetized (i.e. numbed), they will not be able to transmit pain signals. Facet joint injections are performed with diagnostic and therapeutic intent, meaning that it helps to diagnose whether facet joints are the source of pain and to also treat the pain.

HOW IS THE PROCEDURE PERFORMED?

The patient lies on his/her stomach or side. The skin of the back or neck is cleansed with antiseptic solution and a sterile field is created. A small amount of anesthetic is used to numb the skin. Under X-ray guidance (fluoroscopy), a small needle is advanced into the targeted facet joint(s). A small amount of contrast dye is injected to ensure accurate needle placement, then a combination of local anesthetic and steroid is injected. The injection takes about 5-10 minutes to complete.

HOW LONG DOES THE EFFECT LAST?

Pain relief in the first couple of hours after the injection is the most important as this tells us if our diagnosis of pain coming from the facet joints is correct. The pain relief from the local anesthetic typically only lasts a few hours. Pain relief from the steroid takes around 3-10 days to take effect and may last weeks to months. If your pain is relieved by this injection then returns, we will discuss other options available for extended pain relief, such as repeat injection or radiofrequency neurotomy(ablation) of the nerves going to these joints.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP AFTER THE INJECTION?

You will be given a pain log to complete after the procedure as well as instructions on how to return this information to Dr. Michalik's office. It is very important you fill out the pain log accurately. This will help us to measure your response to the injection and determine the next most appropriate step in your care.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS?

Serious side effects and complications are rare. The most common problem after the injection is having slightly increased pain in the area of the injection for up to a few days. The other potential complications are infection, bleeding and nerve injury. These complications are minimized by using sterile technique and fluoroscopic (x-ray) needle guidance. Some individuals may temporarily develop headaches, facial flushing, higher than normal blood pressure, and high blood sugar from the steroid, all of which typically resolve within a few days.