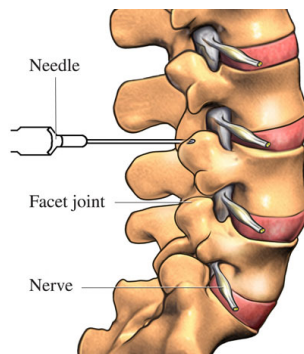


## FACET JOINT INJECTIONS AND MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCKS PATIENT INFORMATION

### Patient Information Sheet

There is an out of pocket fee with this procedure, which is not covered by Medicare, Private Health, TAC or WorkCover. You will be advised of the fee when you make your appointment and payment is to be made on the day of your examination.

You will need a responsible person to drive you home following the procedure.



### Introduction

A facet joint injection is a type of pain relieving injection and usually stops pain stemming from an arthritic or inflamed facet joint.

### The procedure is done under CT guidance

The facet joints are sliding joints at the back of the spine which allow for mobility. Like any joint, they may become arthritic and therefore cause back pain. By injecting a mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid into the area the pain you are experiencing will hopefully be relieved.

Two nerves called "medial branches" supply each facet joint. These nerves carry pain signals to the spinal cord and these signals will eventually reach the brain.

The facet joints and/or medial branch nerves can be injected with a local anaesthetic and/or steroid.

**There are two reasons for doing this:**

- **Diagnosis:** If the local anaesthetic in the injection relieves your pain then it suggests that the facet joints are a source of pain. This can guide future treatment such as “radio frequency ablation” of medial branch nerves.
- **Therapy:** The steroid in the injection can reduce inflammation, reduce medial branch nerve sensitivity and provide long lasting pain relief. The duration of pain relief may vary from weeks to months.

**Risks**

**Risks of spinal procedures are rare and include:**

**Infection:** Most of these are minor (1-2%), however can be serious (<0.1%) requiring hospital admission, intravenous antibiotics and surgery. Signs of infection may include headache, fever, redness and/or pain around the site of injection, or generalized unwellness.

**Bleeding:** This is fortunately also rare and common in patients with bleeding disorders and on “blood thinning” medication.

**Nerve damage:** From direct needle trauma, or as a consequence of the above mentioned complications.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO TELL YOUR DOCTOR PRIOR TO TREATMENT**

Serious side effects are rare, however if you have an existing condition, this must be discussed with your referring doctor before having treatment. People with local skin or systemic infections are at a greater risk of having an infection spreading into the spine after spinal injection treatment. Therefore, if you have a skin infection, which may include wounds, boils or rashes, please tell your doctor or arrange to have the procedure performed at a later date.

## **Procedure**

Not all patients will require a Medial Branch Block. This procedure will be performed if deemed necessary by your doctor and the radiologist. Spinal injection procedures are completed with you lying face down in a CT scanner. We will ensure that you are as comfortable as possible.

A series of planning images are performed, with the area of needle entry planned on the computer terminal and then marked on your skin. The radiologist will then clean your skin with antiseptic wash and inject local anaesthetic into the injection site. This results in a stinging sensation which is temporary until the skin becomes numb, usually taking 10-30 seconds.

A fine needle is then passed through the skin and tissues, constantly manipulated under CT guidance until it enters the facet joint. Injecting a mixture of cortisone and local anaesthetic into the facet joint decreases inflammation and hopefully gives you relief of your symptoms. If a Medial Branch Block is performed the same technique is used.

The effects of the treatment vary and it is difficult to predict the duration of pain relief. In some people pain is relieved for months however for others it produces no relief at all. In the case of the latter your doctor may recommend an alternative treatment.

## **Following the procedure**

At most, you will feel some minor discomfort in the back. As local anaesthetic has been injected into the spine most patients will be pain free. You should not drive for the rest of the day. The following day you may return to work and gradually increase your activities.

## **Follow up**

The radiologist conducting the spinal injection will send your referring doctor a report.

Please contact us on 03 5264 8838 one week following the procedure to let us know if your symptoms have improved.

Whilst every effort is made to keep your appointment time, the special needs of complex cases, elderly & frail patients can cause unexpected delays. Your consideration & patience in these circumstances is appreciated.