

# Facet Joint Injections

For the treatment of pain

## What are facet joints?

Facet joints are small, paired joints (left and right) located along the length of your spine that link the vertebrae together. If the joints are worn, inflamed, traumatised or subject to repeated stress they can give rise to pain. This can result in local inflammation in the joint and the surrounding muscles and ligaments of the spine. Over time this may lead to muscle weakness, stiffness and loss of movement.

One way of finding out whether facet joints are the source of pain is to perform facet joint injections. Simply, this involves injecting a small amount of local anaesthetic to the small nerves to the facet joints, to see if the pain is reduced.

## What are the benefits of facet joint injections?

The aim of treating facet joint pain is to reduce inflammation around the joint and subsequently to strengthen the affected muscles.

## Are there any risks?

Facet joint injections are safe and simple. With X-ray guidance the chances of harm are small.

## What are the alternatives to facet joint injections?

Alternatives will have been discussed with you at your consultation. Depending on your particular situation, these can include measures such as physiotherapy, massage and acupuncture.

## Before your procedure

You may eat and drink normally prior to this treatment. For certain procedures you may be asked to fast. If this is the case, you will be notified at the time of booking your admission date. Please arrive in good time for your appointment. We do not recommend that you drive yourself home, so please arrange to have someone with you or to collect you.

## **Tell the doctor if:**

- You are taking Aspirin, Warfarin, Clopidogrel or similar drugs
- You have a problem with bleeding
- You are allergic to local anaesthetic
- You have any other serious medical problems
- You are unwell on the day.

## **On arrival at the clinic**

Please report to the reception desk. You will then be shown to the waiting area. Prior to the procedure the doctor will explain the treatment and you will be able to ask any questions that you may have about your treatment. When you are completely satisfied that you would like to go ahead and are sure that you fully understand what the procedure entails and the purpose of it, you will be asked to sign a form giving consent to your treatment.

## **How is the procedure performed?**

There is no need to get undressed for the procedure, since we only need to see a small area of your back. Please wear appropriate loose clothing.

You will be asked to lie face down onto the X-ray table and to expose a small area of your back. Usually the bottom three joints are affected on each side, which means a total of six injections.

The skin of the lower back is sprayed with antiseptic (which is cold) and each joint is frozen with local anaesthetic; this may sting a little. The doctor will then position a fine needle into the joint under X-ray guidance. Once in position the injection is given. There is often some discomfort at this point, but this is usually a good sign that the diagnosis of facet joint pain is correct.

## **After your procedure**

After the procedure, you will be taken to the recovery area, where you will be asked to rest for about 30 minutes. During this time, the nurse will assess you to ensure that you are ready to return home with your escort. Do not drive for 24 hours.

## How will I feel?

You will experience back discomfort for a few days and may feel 'bruised'. We normally suggest that you take things gently during this time. Please use your usual analgesics as prescribed.

The pain relieving effect of these injections may not be apparent for up to two weeks. When your back is feeling more comfortable, you will need to perform daily back exercises and muscle stretches. A separate exercise sheet is available. Start slowly and build up time spent exercising over a few weeks.

If pain relief following the injections is disappointing for you, it probably suggests that although the facet joint inflammation has been treated, the muscle pain and lack of function is the ongoing problem. This can and will usually improve over time.

## What happens next?

Follow up arrangements will be discussed with you prior to discharge from hospital. If you have any questions or concerns about the procedure, please contact:

**Pain Management office: 01273 242013**  
**Clinical Nurse Specialist, Chronic Pain**  
**Telephone 01273 242024 Ext 2627.**

If you do not understand this leaflet, we can arrange for an interpreter.

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اگر مندرجات این جزوه را نمیفهمید، ما می‌توانیم مترجم در اختیارتان بگذاریم.

Jeśli masz trudności w zrozumieniu tej ulotki, możemy zorganizować tłumacza.

