



Institute for Low Back and Neck Care

*Physicians dedicated to relieving pain
and improving function*



For any questions, please call your
physician's medical secretary at
952-814-6600.

Lumbar

Facet Joint Injection

(Or facet joint block)

Introduction

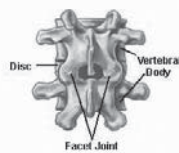
At times it is difficult for the doctor to determine specifically what is causing the pain in a patient's low back and legs.

Diagnostic and therapeutic injections can help the doctor to identify the cause of the pain; therefore, making the plan of treatment more focused and more effective. Finding a specific diagnosis leads to better treatment and better outcomes for the patient.

The Facet Joints

The facet joints are the small joints between the vertebrae on both sides of the spine. Each vertebra has two sets of facets. One pair faces upward and one pair faces downward. These joints provide stability and control for bending and twisting.

Posterior Spinal Segment



Just as a joint in your finger, shoulder, or elbow can cause you discomfort, so can the facet joints in your back. Pain which is mostly in the back and with a less specific, vague aching in the legs (one or both) may be coming from one or more of these little joints in the lumbar area.

The Purpose of the Injection

Injections into the facet joints are done for two main reasons:

Diagnostic: A local anesthetic is used to temporarily block the pain and determine if the pain is coming from the facet joints. This pain relief only lasts until the anesthetic wears off.

Therapeutic: A steroid (usually triamcinolone) is injected to decrease inflammation and swelling that may be present in the facet joints. The steroid usually starts to work in 2-3 days; the optimal effects are not known until 1-2 weeks after the injection. The pain relief from therapeutic injections may vary in duration and degree from none to long-term.

The Procedure

The patient is placed in the prone (laying face down) position with a pillow underneath the abdomen. The skin is sterilely prepared. Fluoroscopic (x-ray) guidance is then used to identify the facet joints to be injected. The skin over the area is anesthetized and a thin needle is advanced into the posterior or back portion of the facet joint. A small volume of contrast solution is then injected which proves that the medication will flow within the joint. Then a small volume of anesthetic with some steroid solution is injected. The patient is cared for in the recovery area for approximately 20 minutes.

Preparing for the Facet Joint Injection

- There are no special dietary instructions for this procedure.
- While the procedure may take less than 30 minutes, you should allow for at least one hour at the procedure center.
- If you are taking prescription blood thinners such as Coumadin (warfarin), Plavix (clopidogrel bisulfate), and Ticlid (ticlopidine), please inform your doctor's medical secretary. These medications will need to be stopped before the procedure, but only after you receive permission from the doctor who is prescribing these medications.
- Also inform your doctor's medical secretary if you are on high doses of aspirin (more than 2 per day).
- If you develop a fever, night sweats, or an active infection, your procedure will need to be rescheduled. Please contact our office at **952-814-6600** immediately to inform us of your change in condition.

Remember that your usual pain may go away for a few hours, but after the local anesthetic wears off, it is normal for your pain to return. You may also have some temporary discomfort at the puncture site. The full effects of the steroid may take 2 days to 2 weeks to work, and its lasting effects vary from person to person.

After the Injection

Follow the specific instructions given to you by the nurses at the procedure center.

- Rest for a few hours, resume activity as tolerated, and use assistance as needed. Do not overexert yourself the first day.
- For discomfort, apply ice packs to the area for 15 minutes several times a day.
- Do not soak in a hot tub for 24 hours after the procedure. You may take showers.
- Observe for any signs of infection including redness and warmth at the injection site, increasing pain, swelling, drainage, chills, night sweats, or fever above 100° F. Report any signs of infection or other unusual symptoms.
- Keep a record of your pain and symptoms after the injection and report your results as instructed by your doctor's medical secretary.

Possible Side Effects of the Steroid

Possible side effects include facial flushing, fluid retention, insomnia, low-grade fever, temporary changes with menstruation, and headache. These side effects usually are minimal and resolve 1-3 days after the procedure. If you have diabetes, your blood sugars may be temporarily elevated.

Potential Risks of Facet Joint Injections

The risks are quite minimal, but are similar to any procedure involving a needle placement. These include, but are not limited to:

- Allergic reaction to the anesthetic, steroid, or contrast dye (be sure to inform us before the injection if you have any known allergies).
- Infection.
- Needle injury to a blood vessel which may bleed.
- Needle injury to a spinal nerve which may cause numbness or muscle weakness (very rare).
- Irritation of the injected structure, which could cause worsening pain.
- Inability to complete the injection due to technically or anatomically not being able to place the needle at the desired target.