

FACET MEDIAN NERVE BLOCKS

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a facet block or medial branch block? A facet block is an injection of local anesthetic and steroid into a joint in the spine. A medial branch block is similar but the medication is placed outside the joint space near the nerve that supplies the joint called the medial branch (steroid may or may not be used). You may require multiple injections depending how many joints are involved.

Facet block or medial branch block may be therapeutic and/or diagnostic. You may find:

The pain does not go away. Which means that the pain is probably not coming from the facet joints.

The pain goes away and stays away for a few hours but the original pain comes back and doesn't get better again. This would mean the block was of diagnostic value, the pain is probably coming from the joints, but the steroid was not of benefit.

The pain goes away after the block, the pain may come back later that day, but the pain gets better again over the next few days. This means that the block was of therapeutic value and the steroid had a long lasting effect on the pain.

If you get lasting relief from the injections, another procedure, Radiofrequency thermo-coagulation may be done, which may last for several months.

What are the risks of the procedure? As with most procedures, there is a remote risk of bleeding, infection, nerve injury, or allergic reaction to the medications used. Short term side effects may occur. If local anesthetic spreads to nearby nerves you may feel weakness or numbness that can last for several hours. You may have increased pain for a few days after the injection. Steroids may cause diabetics to have short-term elevation of blood sugars and people prone to fluid retention may have increased fluid retention for 1-2 weeks.

Will the injection hurt a lot? Most people say the stinging/burning of the numbing medicine is the most uncomfortable part of the procedure.

What happens during the actual procedure? The procedure will be done under x-ray guidance. The skin is anesthetized (numbed) with local anesthetic. This is felt as a stinging or burning sensation, which quickly goes away. Using x-ray guidance, needles are then advanced to the appropriate locations. Once the needles are in the proper location, local anesthetic with or without steroid is injected through the needles and the needles are removed. Your skin will be cleansed and bandages will be applied. The bandages can be removed in the morning.

How will I feel after the injection? Your back pain may be improved immediately after the injection from the local anesthetic. It is important to keep track of how you feel for the remainder of the day. The steroid, when used, takes two or three days to have an effect in most people and peaks in about two weeks. Some local tenderness may be experienced for a couple of days after the injection. Using an ice pack 3-4 times a day will help. You may take your pain medications as ordered. It is important you keep track of the amount of pain relief you received and how long the pain relief lasted.

Will I have restrictions on the day of procedure? You may not drive for the remainder of the day after your injection. No heat is to be used in the injected area for the remainder of the day. No tub or soaking in water for the remainder of the day. You may return to work in a few days, depending on how you feel.

For what reasons should I call the clinic? If you experience severe back pain, new numbness or weakness of your legs, loss of control of your bladder/bowels, or signs of infection in area of the injection.

Note: This procedure cannot be performed if you have an active infection, flu, cold, fever, or very high blood pressure. Please make us aware of these conditions.

We hope this information helps.

Please feel free to contact us for any additional concerns you might have.