

Pain Service

Facet Joint Injections

What is a facet joint injection?

The human spine is made up of a number of bones stacked on top of each other, supported by ligaments and muscles. These bones are called vertebrae. The little joints that link each vertebra together are known as facet joints. They help to stabilise your spine and allow movement.

Facet joints occur in pairs along the length of your spine. The ones that most often cause problems are in the neck (cervical facet joints) or the lower back (lumbar facet joints). There may be a problem with more than one set of joints due to wear and tear, injury, inflammation or previous disc problems.

A facet joint injection is an injection of local anaesthetic and steroid either directly into the joint or to the path of the small nerve which supplies sensation to the joint. It is usual to do several of these injections at one time.

Before the procedure

- Treatment takes place as an outpatient at the Ely day Surgery Unit or Addenbrookes Pain Clinic Treatment Room.
- Your stay may be around two to four hours. Before any treatment begins you will be asked to provide assurance that someone is able to drive you home if you after your injections.
- You will have a morning or an afternoon appointment.
- Your doctor will discuss the procedure with you and ask you to sign a consent form.
- You will be asked to undress and change into a theatre gown and your blood pressure and pulse will be recorded.

The procedure

This information leaflet is to be read in conjunction with the leaflet titled 'Advice to be read before your Pain Clinic injection treatment'.

- You may have a small needle (Cannula) placed in the back of your hand. This allows the doctor to give you sedation if necessary.
- The procedure will be carried out under x-ray screening. This allows the doctor to identify the specific level of facet joints to be treated.

- The level of treatment is determined by where the pain is.
- Once you are lying in the correct position the doctor will clean your back with an antiseptic solution which can feel very cold.
- Needles are then inserted under x-ray control into the correct position. You may feel a pushing sensation or some discomfort at this stage.
- Once the needles are in the correct position local anaesthetic is injected. A feeling of tightness may be felt. You should let the doctor know if you feel pain.

Following the injection

- After the procedure you will be taken to the recovery area where the nursing staff will observe you.
- You may feel a little drowsy and wish to sleep.
- You will lie flat for about 30 minutes and then be assisted to sit up and offered light refreshment.
- Your blood pressure and pulse will be checked frequently.
- You will be advised when to get dressed and will be given advice and a discharge leaflet when you are ready to go home.

Please ensure that you have arranged for someone to drive you home after this procedure. Failure to do so will result in your procedure being cancelled.

If you have had sedation, we recommend that you arrange for someone to stay with you overnight and that you do not drive for 24 hours.

Possible side effects

- Some patients experience mild local tenderness at the site of the injection. This usually settles over the next few days.
- Very rarely, the local anaesthetic may spread causing some numbness in your legs and other areas. This is temporary and will resolve.

What to expect afterwards

- You may experience some soreness or ache from the injection site.
- Some people find that their pain initially feels worse for a few days (pain flare up) before it then settles.
- Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal.
- Try to keep on the move about the house but do not do anything too strenuous.

- As your pain decreases you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming on your back will help to improve your muscle tone and strengthen your back. The best way is to increase your activity slowly.
- Try not to overdo things on a good day so that you end up paying for it with more pain the following day.

Follow up

A letter will be sent to your GP and one of the nurses will telephone you in approximately four weeks.

Points to remember

- Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading
- Always bring a list of all current medication.
- Continue taking all your usual medication on treatment day.
- If there is any possibility you may be pregnant please inform the doctor or nurse.

Additional information

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. If you require more information or have any questions please speak to your GP or contact the Pain Clinic.

Telephone number: 01223 217796



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

Authors	Pain Service
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