

FACET INJECTION

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What is a facet injection or facet neurolytic injection and why is it helpful? Facet blocks using cortisone/Marcaine or a neurolytic agent (Dextrose 50/Phenol) will decrease the sensitivity of the facet joint capsule and the medial branch nerve, thus relieving facet pain. After a series of injections, in the case of neurolytic injections, the medial branch nerves might be destroyed for 3-6 months. It may provide permanent relief or provide a period of pain relief for several months.

What is the facet joint? The facet joints are true joints supporting the back of your back or neck. At each level of your spine (5 in the lower back and 7 in the neck), there is a pair of facet joints. These are similar in structure to your knee and ankle joints, endowed with cartilage, capsule, meniscoid, and synovial membrane. Of course, they are much smaller joints. They can hold about 10-20 drops of fluid versus the knee joint which can hold up to 1-2 cups! Each facet joint is supplied by two small nerves called the medial branch nerves. Each facet joint has a capsule which is highly innervated with pain nerve fibers called the medial branch. It is believed that neurolytic blocks can reduce pain by decreasing the sensitivity of the medial branch nerves and strengthen the facet capsule.

How does the scheduling process work? Our office will call your insurance carrier to obtain authorization for the procedure. This process may take from a few days to a month depending on your insurance. You may call this office in two weeks to check on the authorization status. You may also call the insurance directly to make inquiry. Once authorization is given, our scheduler will call you to set up the appointment. The procedure is done at Spine & Sports Surgery Center as an outpatient.

What happens during the procedure? An IV is usually placed so that relaxation medication can be given, though this is not always necessary. If you do not wish to receive sedation, the IV is optional. However, as a safety precaution in case of an allergic reaction to the injected solution, an IV is highly recommended for the first injection. You are placed face down on the x-ray table. The skin on the back is painted with an aseptic solution Betadine. Next, the physician numbs a small area of skin with numbing medicine. This medicine stings for several seconds. After the numbing medicine has been given time to be effective, the physician directs a small needle, using x-ray guidance to the facet joint capsule or to the medial branch nerve. A mixture of numbing medicine (anesthetic) and Dextrose 50 (and occasionally Phenol) is injected. For each facet joint treated, two medial branch nerves need to be injected. This procedure will be repeated for each facet joint. The procedure is approximately 10-15 minutes.

What happens after the procedure? You are then returned to the recovery area where they are monitored for 15-30 minutes. A follow-up appointment will be made for a repeat block if indicated. Facet neurolytic blocks are usually done in a series of two (2) to six (6), about two (2) weeks apart. A minimal of two injections is needed. Additional injections will be determined based on your response to the first two injections. You may have slight increase in pain for one (1) to two (2) days after the procedure. The back or legs (or neck and arms in case of cervical injections) may feel weak or numb for a few hours.

Risks and Complications: Facet injections performed under X ray guidance by an experienced physician are extremely safe. Potential complications including infections, bleeding, nerve injury could occur. These complications are disclosed as required by laws but are exceedingly rare. If you are a diabetic, your blood sugar level may rise for a few hours after the injection. There are no known side effects with Dextrose 50.

General Pre/Post Instructions: If you choose to have IV sedation, you must not eat or drink within 6 hours of the procedure. Otherwise, you can eat a light meal within one-two hours before the procedure. You may take your routine medications with sips of water (i.e. high blood pressure and diabetic medications). You have to be hurting prior to this procedure. They may not take medications that may give pain relief or lessen their usual pain. Please inform your physician if you are taking Aspirin or blood thinner medications (Coumadin or Plavix). These medications must be stopped (per the approval of your private physician) at least 7-14 days prior to the procedure. You must stop taking all anti-inflammatory medications 3 days prior to the procedure. You are generally asked to be at the surgery center 30 minutes prior to the procedure and can expect to be at that facility approximately 2 hours. A driver must accompany you and be responsible for getting you home. No driving is allowed the day of the procedure if you receive sedation. You may drive if you do not receive sedation, though, this is not recommended. Icing of the area is recommended for the first day. You may return to your normal activities the day after the procedure.

If You Still Have Questions Please call the clinic that you were seen and make an appointment with your doctor so that your questions can be answered. It would be best that your questions are answered in person rather than over the phone. You may also visit our website www.ssmедgroup.com for additional information and links to other useful sites. Remember that facet block is an elective procedure. Please make sure you understand the indications, risks, and benefits of the procedure before proceeding.