



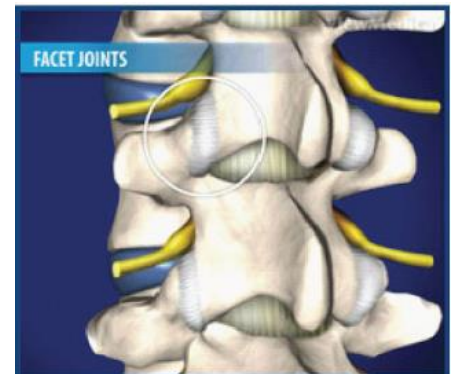
Lumbar Facet Joint Injection

Procedure Information

A facet joint injection is a diagnostic tool to determine the source of back pain although it may also be used to provide temporary pain relief. There are many causes of lumbar (lower) back pain, including muscle strain, ligament or disc sprain and degeneration of the lumbar spine related to aging which can lead to osteoarthritis, also known as lumbar spondylosis. In many cases, rest followed by a physical therapy program will relieve lower back pain; however, chronic back pain due to wear and tear will often require more intensive treatment.

SPINE ANATOMY

The human spine is comprised of 24 bones called vertebrae which are stacked on top of each other to create the spine. There are four facet joints associated with each vertebra, a pair that face up and another pair that face downward. The facet joints interlock with those on the adjacent vertebrae and provide stability to the spine. Each vertebrae is separated by a disc which provides cushioning between the bones. The spinal cord runs down the spinal canal which is protected by the spine.



LUMBAR PAIN

There are three main structures that cause lumbar pain – lumbar discs, facet joints and spinal nerves. As you age, vertebral discs shrink which reduces the cushioning and increases pressure through the facet joints. This causes the cartilage to wear away, uncovering the underlying bone and causing the joints to become inflamed, swollen and painful.

Pain is often worse after periods of inactivity, especially after rising from bed. It can radiate into the buttocks and down the back of the thigh/s and can be constant with fluctuating severity or present with repeated acute increases of back pain. There is often tenderness overlying the joint as well as lower back stiffness due to muscle spasm. The pain may also be over to one side and is often worse when leaning backwards rather than forwards.

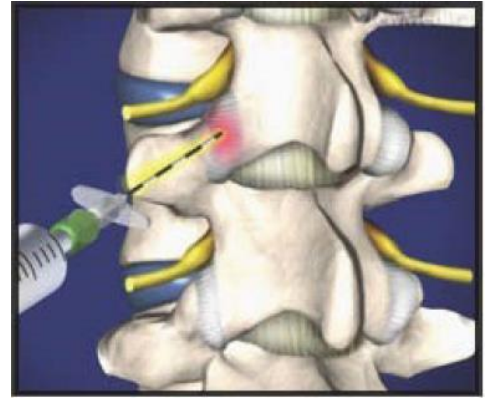
DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis begins with a history and physical examination. Investigations may include X-ray, CAT scan, MRI scan or bone scan. If the scans are unable to confirm the source of the pain, a lumbar facet joint injection may be recommended.

THE PROCEDURE

A facet joint injection is done as an outpatient by a radiologist or pain specialist. You are awake for the procedure however sedation is available. You do not normally need to fast beforehand but please inform your specialist if you are taking any blood thinning medications such as Aspirin or Warfarin as these may need to be ceased. Please ensure you bring any relevant scans with you.

You will lie face down on an X-ray table and a local anaesthetic will be injected to numb the skin and tissue above the facet joint/s where the pain is located. With the aid of a fluoroscope (X-ray) or CAT scan, a needle will be passed through the numbed area and into the facet joint/s. Correct placement will be confirmed using contrast dye.



Once the needle is correctly positioned, a local anaesthetic and long-lasting corticosteroid will be injected into the facet joint/s.

The procedure will take 20-30 minutes but can vary depending on the number of facet joints to be injected. Once the procedure is completed, you will be observed for ill-effects for a short time before being discharged. Please ensure you have someone to drive you home. You may have some leg weakness or numbness for several hours after the procedure.

You will be given a pain chart to complete following discharge. It is vital that this chart is completed as fully and accurately as possible as this will be used to determine if further treatment is necessary.

SIDE EFFECTS & RISKS

Side effects after this procedure are rare although you may develop some bruising from the needle. You may also experience some long-lasting numbness in the injected area or down the leg. Other risks include:

- Worsening pain at the injection site
- Bleeding causing a haematoma
- Infection of the skin or injection point
- Headache if the injections causes a spinal tap (release of spinal fluid)
- Steroids can cause elevation in blood sugar levels in diabetics
- Allergic reaction to the medication

If you have any concerns, please contact the radiology department where you underwent the procedure. **Please call 000 if you are affected by any life-threatening symptoms.**

WHAT TO EXPECT

A facet joint injection is not a treatment and is not permanent. If you do not experience any pain relief following the procedure, this suggests that the facet joint/s is not the source of the pain so further investigations will be required. If you do experience pain relief following the injection, it is temporary and will wear off over several hours although the corticosteroid that was injected may provide some pain relief for a few weeks. Your specialist will discuss suitable treatment options with you at your follow up appointment.