

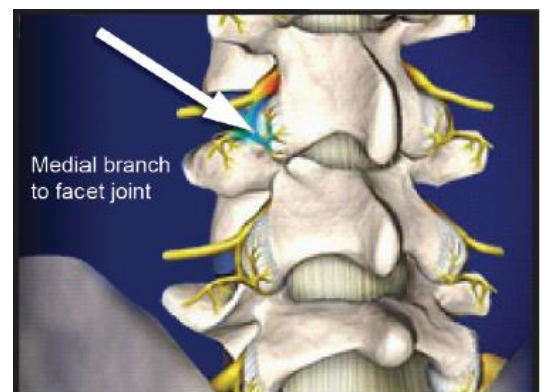
Lumbar Facet Joint Medial Branch Block & Rhizotomy

Procedure Information

A facet joint medial branch block and rhizotomy is used to treat chronic back pain following a lumbar facet joint injection that has successfully determined the source of your back pain. The facet joint medial branch block and rhizotomy is a two-pronged procedure that stops the nerves that supply the facet joints from sending pain signals to the brain. A facet joint rhizotomy is also known as facet joint denervation, neurotomy or medial branch ablation.

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. Each facet joint is supplied by two nerves, the medial branches of the dorsal rami (spinal nerves), which control sensation to the facet joint. These nerves are responsible for the pain experienced due to degeneration or inflammation of the lumbar facet joint. They do not control sensations or muscles in your skin or surrounding tissues.



MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCK

A medial branch block is a reversible procedure where local anaesthetic is injected into the nerves that supply the facet joint. This is done prior to the rhizotomy, which permanently cuts or destroys the nerves, to confirm the correct facet joint/s is being treated. If the medial branch block provides pain relief, the rhizotomy can then be undertaken. If the medial branch block does not provide pain relief, it is not recommended to proceed to rhizotomy and other treatments should be considered.

FACET JOINT RHIZOTOMY

A facet joint rhizotomy cuts or destroys the medial branch nerves that carry pain signals from the facet joints to the brain. This is done by heating the nerves with radio waves which deadens them and stops them from sending pain signals. The nerves will eventually grow back but the pain may or may not return. Should the pain return, this procedure can be repeated.

THE PROCEDURE

A facet joint medial branch block and rhizotomy 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 and previously completed pain chart 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 where the pain is located.

With the aid of a fluoroscope (X-ray) or CAT scan, an electrode will be passed through the numbed area and into the facet joint. Correct placement will be confirmed through a trial stimulation of the nerves.

Once the electrode is correctly positioned, a radiofrequency heating current is applied to deaden the nerve. This process will be repeated for each nerve that needs to be destroyed.

The procedure will take 20-30 minutes but can vary depending on the number of facet joints to be treated. 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 will be able to walk afterwards but as the procedure involves heating the tissue around the nerves which may cause swelling and inflammation, you may suffer from temporarily increased pain which can persist for several days.

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 cerebrospinal fluid)
- Damage to the nerve centre/ganglion can cause new onset of pain in the back and/or leg

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 medial branch block and rhizotomy should provide pain relief that lasts for at least 9-12 months. If the pain returns, the procedure can be repeated. In some cases, the rhizotomy does not provide the expected level of pain relief which may be due to alternate causes of the symptoms such as disc degeneration. In this case, further investigations will need to be undertaken to determine other suitable treatments.

