

Facet Joint Injection

Why has my doctor ordered this injection?

As a normal part of the aging process, the bony joints of the spine stiffen and lose flexibility. Vertebral joints (called facet joints) may degenerate and cause pain and irritation. An injection of steroid into these joints can sometimes help relieve pain, or at least confirm the source of the pain.

What will happen during the procedure?

Once you are positioned appropriately, the area to be injected is cleansed. The doctor will then anesthetize this area using a small, thin needle. A fluoroscope (x-ray guidance machine) assists in identifying the specific area to be injected. A small amount of iodine is then injected to confirm correct positioning of the needle. A combination of anesthetic and steroid is then given. You will be asked to get up gradually, and will be taken to an area where your recovery will be monitored. You will need someone to drive you home.

What should I expect after the injection?

While you may feel immediate relief of pain symptoms with the anesthetic, it may take three to five days for the steroid to take a more lasting effect. Typically, your pain will return temporarily after the anesthetic wears off (in one to three hours). Hopefully, your symptoms will subside again once the steroid takes effect. The length of time relief is felt varies from person to person. Follow up with your doctor's nurse if your pain is not relieved within a week of your injection.

What are the associated risks?

The risk of infection with a procedure of this type is less than 1%.

There is a minimal risk of bleeding associated with the injection. Be sure to notify your doctor's nurse if you are taking any aspirin products, anti-inflammatory medications (such as Motrin, Advil or Aleve), or blood thinners (like Coumadin) because you will need to discontinue these prior to the injection.

Very rarely allergic reaction may occur due to sensitivity to one of the medications used. For this reason, a small intravenous catheter is placed in your arm vein prior to the injection so that medication to counteract any allergic reaction can be given if necessary.

Occasionally some patients experience flushing, headache, and elevated blood sugar levels. If you are diabetic, you'll need to monitor your glucose levels more frequently for three or four days following the injection.

Notify your doctor's nurse if you experience severe headache, fever, or other unusual symptoms.