

Pain Management Service

Facet joint denervation procedure

What is a facet joint denervation?

The human spine is made up of a number of bones stacked up on top of each other, these bones are called vertebrae. The little joints that link the vertebrae together are known as facet joints. They help to stabilise your spine and allow movement. Facet joints occur in pairs along the length of the spine. The ones that cause the most problems are the ones in the neck which are the **cervical** facet joints or the ones in the lower back which are the **lumbar** facet joints.

A **denervation (rhizolysis)** is a procedure that aims to change the way pain is transmitted from the facet joints to the brain. The nerve is interrupted by heating (cauterising) it with an electrical current from a special device, called a radio-frequency machine.

This treatment is usually carried out after other procedures, such as facet joint steroid injections have been done

Benefits

If with the facet joint injections you had temporary pain relief, it is possible that following facet joint denervation you may experience longer -lasting pain relief (between 6 – 18 months)

Risks

Unfortunately no pain procedure can be risk free. There is also no guarantee that this procedure will relieve your pain.

Short term side effects include:

- Pain and discomfort at the site of the injection which may last up to 3 weeks
- Infection, bruising and bleeding.
- There is a possibility that you may have an allergic reaction to the drugs used.
- The procedure can cause some numbness or a burning sensation in the buttocks and legs or shoulder and neck. This is temporary and will usually resolve.



Patient Information

Long term effects are uncommon and include:

- The possibility of an increase in pain.
- The possibility of permanent nerve damage leading to problems such as numbness and weakness in the arm or leg. Please discuss these with your consultant about this if you have any concerns

Before the procedure

- You will have the treatment as a day case.
- You will be sent an appointment to attend the surgical day unit at University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire at Walsgrave, Coventry.
- You should arrange for someone to drive you home after your injection.
- Your stay on the unit may vary between one to five hours.
- Please bring a list of your current medications with you.
- You will be asked to undress and put on a theatre gown. You can keep your underwear on.
- Your doctor will discuss the procedure with you and ask you to sign a consent form. As the procedure involves the use of X-rays female patients will be asked for details of their last menstrual period. If there is any possibility that you may be pregnant please inform the doctor or nurse.

The procedure

- The procedure is carried out under X-ray screening. This allows the doctor to identify the specific level to be treated.
- A self adhesive foil plate will be placed on your thigh; this is connected to the radiofrequency machine to make an electric circuit.
- Once you are laying in the correct position the doctor will clean your back with an antiseptic solution which may feel cold.
- A local anaesthetic is injected at the site of the procedure. This may sting initially, before the skin goes numb. Multiple injections may be needed
- It important that you keep still during the procedure as a special hollow needle will be carefully inserted under X-ray control into the correct position. A very thin wire will then be threaded down the needle. Occasionally 2 needles may be used.
- The doctor may ask you to say when you can feel a mild pain or twitching sensation as the machine settings are adjusted. This is very important as it makes sure that the tip of the needle is in the right place.
- The machine settings will then be set to cauterise / burn the nerve by heating it for about a minute. During this period, you may experience some pain at the site of the procedure.
- This process may be repeated at different levels on the neck or back.
- A small dressing will be placed over the injection sites. This can be removed in the evening.

Patient Information

Following the procedure

- After the procedure you will be taken to an area to recover. The nursing staff will observe you before going home.
- Take your regular medication and pain killers as normal.
- There may be an initial increase in discomfort (for 48 – 72 hours) before you start experiencing the pain relief. During this period you may need to increase your pain killers or require stronger pain killers. Please see your GP if your current pain killers are not working.

Please ensure that you have arranged for someone to drive you home after this procedure.

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 doctor prior to the consent for the procedure.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact the pain management secretaries on 024 7696 5880 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

Document History

Author	Tracy Barnes / Robin Correa
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Published	November 2007
Reviewed	Nov 2009, Dec 2011, Dec2013, Aug 2014, Jan 2016, Jan 2018
Review	January 2020
Version	6.1
Reference	HIC/LFT/592/07