

Pain Management Service

Facet joint denervation procedure

What a facet joint denervation is

The human spine is made up of a number of bones stacked on top of each other. These bones are called vertebrae. The small joints that link the vertebrae together are known as facet joints. They help to stabilise your spine and allow it to move. Facet joints occur in pairs along the length of the spine. The ones that most commonly cause problems are:

- **Cervical** facet joints (in the neck)
- **Lumbar** facet joints (in the lower back)

A facet joint **denervation (also called rhizolysis)** is a procedure that aims to reduce pain from these joints. The small nerve supplying the joint is interrupted by heating it with an electrical current from a radiofrequency machine. This treatment is usually offered after other procedures, such as facet joint steroid injections, have already been tried.

Benefits

If you had short-term pain relief from facet joint injections, you may get longer-lasting relief from denervation. Pain relief can last between 6 and 18 months.

Risks

No procedure is risk-free, and pain relief is not guaranteed.

Short-term side effects include:

- Pain and discomfort at the injection site, (may last up to 3 weeks).



Patient Information

- Infection, bruising and bleeding.
- Allergic reaction to the medicines used.
- Temporary numbness or a burning sensation in the buttocks, legs, shoulder, or neck (this usually settles).

Long-term effects are uncommon but may include:

- Increased pain.
- Permanent nerve problems, such as numbness or weakness in the arm or leg.

Please discuss any concerns with your consultant.

Before the procedure

- You will have the treatment as a day case.
- You will receive an appointment to attend the surgical day unit at University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire (Walsgrave) or at the Hospital of St Cross (Rugby).
- Arrange for someone to drive you home after your injection.
- You may be in the unit between 1 to 5 hours.
- Bring a list of your current medicines.
- You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. You may keep your underwear on.
- Your doctor will explain the procedure and ask you to sign a consent form.
- The procedure may use X-rays. If you are a female, you will be asked about your last menstrual period. If there is any chance you may be pregnant, tell the doctor or nurse.

The procedure

- The procedure is carried out using X-ray guidance so the doctor can identify the correct levels to treat.
- A self-adhesive foil plate will be placed on your thigh. This connects to the radiofrequency machine and completes the electric circuit.

Patient Information

- You will lie in the correct position, and your skin will be cleaned with antiseptic, which may feel cold.
- A local anaesthetic is injected into the skin. This may sting briefly before it goes numb. More than one injection may be needed.
- It is important to keep still during the procedure. A special hollow needle is guided into position using X-ray control. A thin wire is passed through the needle. Occasionally, 2 needles are used.
- The doctor may ask you to say when you can feel a mild pain or twitch. This helps confirm the needle is in the correct place.
- The nerve is then heated for about one minute to interrupt the pain signals. You may feel some pain at this stage.
- This process may be repeated at different levels of the neck or back.
- A small dressing will be applied. This can be removed in the evening.

After the procedure

- You will be taken to a recovery room.
- Nursing staff will observe you before you go home.
- Take your regular medicines and pain killers as normal.
- You may have increased discomfort for 48 – 72 hours before pain relief begins. You may need stronger painkillers during this time. See your GP if your current medicine is not working.

Please make sure someone drives you home after this procedure.

More information

This leaflet does not replace advice from your doctor. If you have any questions, please speak to your doctor before signing the consent form.

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.

Patient Information

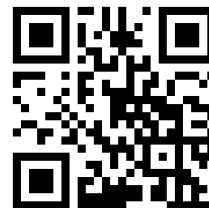
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