

## Pain Management Service

# Facet joint injections

### What a facet joint injection is

The human spine is made up of a number of bones stacked on top of each other. These bones are called vertebrae. They are joined together and supported by ligaments and muscles.

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)

Problems can affect more than one set of joints. Causes include wear and tear, injury, inflammation (the body's response to irritation), or previous disc problems.

A facet joint injection is an injection of local anaesthetic, with or without steroid. It is given either directly into the joint or near the small nerve that supplies it. It is usual to give several injections at one time.

The injection is often used as a test to see if your pain is coming from the joint or the nerve. If the injection helps to reduce your pain, a longer-lasting procedure may be offered at a later date.



## Patient Information

### Benefits

Some patients get good pain relief from the injection. Even if the relief is short-term, the results help your doctor decide whether to offer a longer-lasting procedure. This is known as a **facet joint denervation** procedure, which can provide pain relief for a longer period.

### Risks

**No procedure is risk-free. Short-term side effects include:**

- Pain and discomfort where the injection was given
- Infection, bruising, or bleeding
- A possible reaction to the medicines used
- Temporary numbness in the buttocks or legs if the local anaesthetic spreads (this will settle.)

**Long-term effects are uncommon but may include:**

- Increased pain
- Permanent nerve problems, such as numbness or weakness

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 for 2 to 4 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.

## Patient Information

- The procedure may involve 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.
- You will lie in a position that allows access to your back or neck.
- Your skin will be cleaned with antiseptic solution, which may feel cold.
- A local anaesthetic is injected into the skin. This may sting briefly before the skin goes numb.
- It is important to keep still while the doctor carefully guides the needle into position using X-ray control. You may feel some pressure or mild discomfort at this stage.
- When the needle is in the correct position, the doctor will inject the local anaesthetic and/or steroid. You may feel a sense of tightness. Tell the doctor if you feel pain.
- A small dressing may be applied. This can be removed in the evening.

## After the procedure

- You will be taken to a recovery area.
- Nursing staff will observe you before you go home.
- Take care when getting off the trolley and make sure you feel steady.
- Take your regular medicines and pain killers as normal.
- Your pain may feel worse for a few days before it improves. You may need to increase your usual pain relief during this time. If your pain is not controlled, contact your GP.
- A letter will be sent to your GP explaining the procedure.

**Please make sure someone drives you home after the injection.**

## Patient Information

### 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.

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