

SEATTLE SPINE & SPORTS MEDICINE

TREATING FACET JOINT PAIN WITH IMAGE-GUIDED INJECTIONS

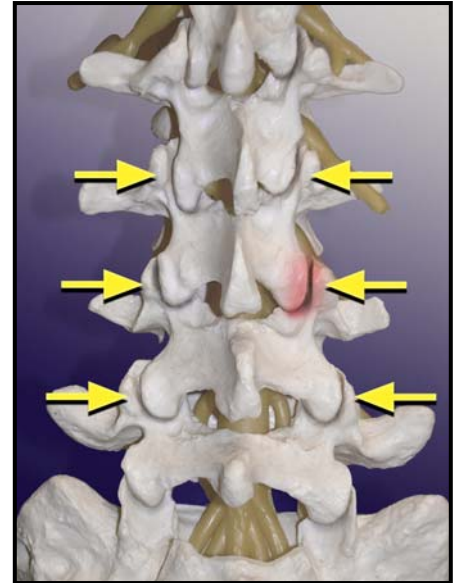
Facet joints are located on each side of the vertebra (yellow arrows in the picture). When irritated or injured, they can become inflamed and cause back or neck pain.

WHAT IS A FACET JOINT BLOCK?

- A facet joint block is an injection of cortisone and an anesthetic into the facet joint.
- It helps confirm if the facet joints are the source of low back pain.
- Therapeutically, it can relieve pain and inflammation.
- In a similar procedure—a *medial branch block*—the doctor injects local anesthetic into the adjacent nerves that supply facet joints. This provides additional diagnostic information.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT DURING THE PROCEDURE?

- The skin and underlying tissue is numbed with an injection of local anesthetic (Lidocaine).
- Using moving x-ray image guidance (fluoroscopy), a larger needle is placed into the facet joint.
- A small amount of contrast dye is injected to assure correct placement. Then a small volume of corticosteroid (cortisone) plus local anesthetic is injected into the joint.
- In a medial branch block, local anesthetic is injected near the facet joint at nerves that supply the joint.



HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE?

- Talk to our providers about medications and supplements you usually take.
- If you take blood thinners, ask for special instructions to stop them before the procedure.
- We do not recommend this procedure for patients who are pregnant.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT AFTER THE PROCEDURE?

- Local anesthetic injected at the facet joint will usually last 3-12 hours.
- The cortisone may take a few days to begin working.
- Avoid heavy lifting and other activities that can stress your lower back for one or two days after the procedure.
- Carefully monitor your symptoms. Tell your provider at your follow-up appointment.

WILL THIS PROCEDURE GIVE LONG-TERM RELIEF?

- For most patients, a facet joint block relieves pain and inflammation for weeks to months, and sometimes longer.
- The procedure may also help you get on with your other treatment such as an exercise program.
- If the procedure provides a positive diagnostic response without long-term relief, we can discuss a longer-lasting procedure called facet joint neurotomy. This procedure is fairly technical, and requires referral to another specialist.

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