

Facet Joint Injection

What is a facet joint injection and why is it performed?

- Facet joints are small joints at each segment of the spine in the neck and back that provide stability and help guide motion. Each vertebral level has one pair of facet joints.
- Facet joint injections can be used to help diagnose the cause and location of pain or to treat pain related to facet joint dysfunction. Facet joint injections can be performed in the neck (cervical), upper back (thoracic), or lower back (lumbar). The exact location at which the procedure is performed at depends on where your pain is coming from.
- A facet joint injection involves the administration of a local anesthetic (when done as a diagnostic procedure) or a mixture of local anesthetic and an anti-inflammatory medication known as a steroid (when done for treatment purposes).

What to do before the procedure

- Review the handout called 'Pre-Procedure Instructions for Fluoroscopy'.
- If you take any anticoagulant/antiplatelet (blood thinner) medications, you must discuss this with your pain specialist well before the procedure date because these types of medications have to be stopped prior to performing a facet joint injection in order to prevent serious bleeding from occurring. There are several types of blood thinner medications and when exactly to stop the medication depends on the type of blood thinner medication taken.

What to expect during the procedure

- This procedure will take about 10 to 30 minutes and is done using x-ray guidance.
- You will need to lie face down for this procedure. Once the needle is confirmed to be in the correct position, the medication is injected.

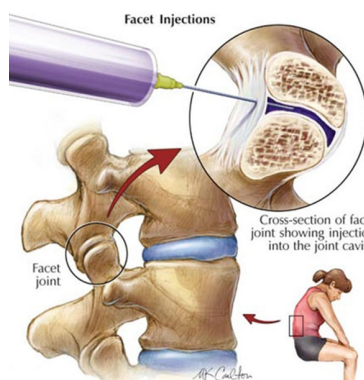


Image source : <https://www.sportspainmanagementnyc.com/spinal-facet-injections/>

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What to expect after the procedure

- If a steroid was injected, you will know if the procedure has helped after 1-3 days.
- The expected duration of pain relief from a facet joint injection is upwards of 6 to 8 weeks. If a facet joint injection is effective at achieving the goals of therapy/functional improvement, it may be repeated.
- In some cases, you may have no pain relief.

Side effects and risks

- Steroid injections are generally well tolerated; side effects are usually mild and resolve in a few days. Some patients may experience:
 - flushing of the face that can last a few days
 - increased blood pressure or blood sugar
 - fluid retention
 - mood swings
 - irritability
 - anxiety
 - and/or trouble sleeping
- Prolonged steroid use can result in a weaker immune system, bone weakness/fractures, and cataracts. Rarely, steroid injections can interfere with the body's normal steroid production (1 in 10, 000 cases). Very rarely, steroid use can cause severe hip arthritis that can require a hip replacement.
- Bleeding is a rare complication. It is more likely to happen in patients with underlying bleeding conditions or those who take blood thinners.
- Infectious complications are rare.
- **If you experience the following after your injection, you must seek immediate medical attention by contacting the pain clinic (519-646-6100 ext. 61786) or going to the nearest emergency room.**
 - **Numbness and weakness**
 - **Loss of bowel and bladder function**
 - **Severe back pain**