



PAINLESS

PATIENT FACTSHEET

TITLE

Facet Joint Injections

SUMMARY

Facet joint injections are a low-risk diagnostic procedure used to diagnose facet joint pain, also called posterior element pain. This factsheet explains how and why you may consider a facet joint injection procedure, as well as the potential risks and recovery requirements.

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FACET JOINT PAIN

A significant number of spinal pain issues stem from your spine's facet joints. The facet joints, the muscles behind them and the connective tissues that support them are collectively referred to as the 'posterior elements'. Posterior element pain is most commonly associated with lower back pain and neck pain (and, less commonly, with upper back pain). There are two classes of procedures used for facet joint pain.

DIAGNOSTIC PROCEDURES

Imaging studies can't reveal posterior element pain. For this reason, a diagnostic procedure must be performed

to confirm the diagnosis. The current gold standard for diagnosing posterior element pain is a facet joint injection or medial branch block.

INTERVENTIONAL PROCEDURES

Once we have determined whether a significant proportion of your pain is coming from the facet joints, we can use an interventional procedure to provide longer lasting relief. A facet joint neurotomy is the most effective method of relieving facet joint pain.

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PAINLESS

FACET JOINT INJECTIONS

Facet joint injections are a low-risk diagnostic procedure used to diagnose facet joint pain, also called posterior element pain. There are two approaches to performing injections into the facet joint. The first approach –called a facet joint injection – involves a single injection for each affected facet joint.

The second approach is called a medial branch block. It involves three injections to block one facet joint level. Medial branch blocks deliver a greater effect over a larger area. Typically, these injections are given at one or more levels, depending on your needs.

HOW IT WORKS

1. You will be supplied with light anaesthetic sedation.
2. Imaging will be used to place the needle into or near the affected facet joint.
3. A local anaesthetic (LA), combined with a steroid, will be injected.
4. This process will be repeated for each affected facet joint.
5. Once the procedure is complete, you will be moved to the recovery room.

EFFECTS

The LA will numb the facet joints for a few hours. If your pain reduces by 70% (or even 50%), we can make the diagnosis that this percentage of pain is coming from the facet joints and associated muscles.

The steroids will take effect after 24 hours. Their impact will gradually over the following four weeks. The steroids work by reducing inflammation in the affected area. Some people get medium to long term relief – however, this is considered a fortuitous outcome.

RISKS & SIDE EFFECTS

Common Side Effects: Local bruising or swelling over the needle site. People with diabetes may experience a temporary elevation of blood sugar levels for up to two weeks after the procedure. Worsening in pain or heaviness in legs may occur and last several hours.

Rare Side Effects: Infection or allergic reactions.