

Facet Joint Injections

As a normal part of the aging process, the bony structures of the spine stiffen and lose flexibility. Vertebral joints (called facet joints) may degenerate and cause pain and irritability. An injection of steroid into these joints can help relieve pain.

What happens during the facet joint injection procedure?

Once you're positioned appropriately, the area to be injected is cleansed. The doctor will then anesthetize this area using a small, thin needle. A fluoroscope (X-ray guidance machine) assists in identifying the specific area to be injected. A special X-ray dye is then injected to confirm correct positioning of the needle. A combination of anesthetic and steroid is then given. You will be asked to get up gradually and will be taken to an area where the nurse will monitor you for approximately 30 minutes.

What should I expect after a facet joint injection?

You will need someone to drive you home. While you may feel immediate relief of pain symptoms with the anesthetic, it may take up to 3–5 days for the steroid to take effect. Typically, your pain will return temporarily after the anesthetic wears off (in 1–3 hours). Hopefully, your symptoms will subside again once the steroid takes effect. The length of time relief is felt varies from person to person. Follow up with your doctor's nurse if your pain is not relieved within 2 weeks of your injection.

What are the risks associated with facet joint injections?

The risk of infection with a procedure of this type is less than 1%.

There is a minimal risk of bleeding associated with the injection. Be sure to notify your doctor's nurse if you are taking any aspirin products, anti-inflammatory medications (such as Motrin, Advil, or Aleve), or blood thinners (like Coumadin, Plavix, or Aggrenox) because you will need to discontinue these prior to the injection.

Allergic reaction may occur very rarely due to sensitivity to one of the medications used. For this reason, a small IV is placed prior to the injection so that medication to counteract allergic reaction can be given if necessary.

Occasionally some patients experience flushing, headache, and elevated blood glucose levels. If you are diabetic, you'll need to monitor your glucose levels more frequently for 4 or 5 days following the injection.

Notify your doctor's nurse if you experience severe headache, fever, or other unusual symptoms. You may call (404) 778-7000 if you have any questions.