

# What is a facet block injection and how is it performed?

An image guided facet joint injection involves a radiologist (specialist doctor) using either X-ray guidance ( fluoroscopy ) or a computed tomography (CT) scanner to guide the injection of a thin needle containing a mixture of corticosteroid (or 'steroid') and local anaesthetic into one of these facet joints. The injections are designed to decrease inflammation in the facet joint and will often reduce pain.

The injection is inserted into the facet joints, which are located on each side of the vertebra and connect the vertebra of the back together. The injection helps reduce inflammation in the tissue of the facet joint.

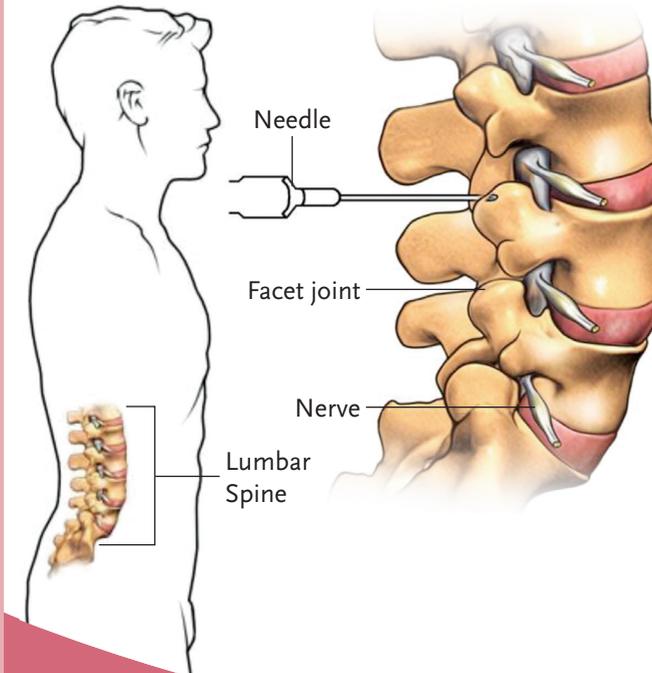


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## Facet / Nerve Block Injection



## Procedure

Usually no special preparation is required before the procedure. The radiologist/referring physician will explain the procedure and consent is obtained before the procedure.

Try to bring your most recent X-Rays / CT scans / MRI films with you.

You will be asked to change to an X ray gown so that metallic objects e.g zippers and buttons do not obstruct the visualization of area of interest.

In preparation for a facet joint injection, you will be asked to lie on the abdomen . The skin over the area of the spine to be treated will be well cleansed. Next, the radiologist will numb a small area of skin with local anaesthetic. Then, the radiologist will use fluoroscopy (live x-ray) or CT imaging to direct a very small needle into the joint. A small mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid is then slowly injected.

After the procedure, at most, you will feel some minor discomfort in the back. As local anaesthetic has been injected into the spine most patients will be pain free. Patients are able to walk freely after the procedure and are observed in the department for up to half hour. Following this, you may be discharged if you are feeling well. You should not drive for the rest of the day.. The nurse will also make sure you don't have any unexpected side effects before you leave the department. The following day you may return to work and gradually increase your activities.

## What is a Nerve Block?

A nerve block is an anaesthetic or anti-inflammatory injection targeted toward a certain nerve or group of nerves to treat pain. The purpose of the injection is to “turn off” a pain signal coming from a specific location in the body or to decrease inflammation in that area.

Imaging guidance, such as fluoroscopy or computed tomography (CT Scan), may be used to help the doctor place the needle in exactly the right location so that the patient can receive maximum benefit from the injection.

## Procedure

Usually no special preparation is required. The radiologist/referring physician will explain the procedure and consent is obtained before the procedure. Try to bring your most recent MRI with you.

You will be asked to change to an X ray gown so that metallic objects e.g zippers and buttons do not obstruct the visualization of area of interest.

You will be positioned on a table or other surface to allow the doctor access to the site(s) to be injected. The doctor will then identify the spot the needle needs to be placed, using palpation and/ or imaging guidance. He or she will clean the area with antiseptic solution, and then the needle will be inserted at a specific depth to deliver the medication as close to the problematic nerve(s) as possible. . The radiologist may then inject several drops of contrast dye to confirm the position of the needle. A small mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid is then slowly injected.

More than one injection may be required, depending on how many areas of pain you have or how large an

area needs to be covered. The doctor will most likely tell you when he or she inserts the needle and when the injection is done.

When finished, you will be allowed to rest for up to half hour to let the medication take effect. The nurse will also make sure you don't have any unexpected side effects before you leave the department.

## What are the benefits vs. risks?

### Benefits

- Temporary pain relief
- Temporary reduction of inflammation in the region of the spine causing pain
- May help the doctor identify a more specific cause of pain
- Better ability to function in daily life without the restrictions previously caused by pain

### Risks

- Infection at the injection site
- Bleeding
- Accidental delivery of medication into the blood stream
- Unexpected spread of medication to other nerves
- Hitting the “wrong” nerve in an attempt to block the targeted nerve, if the nerves are close together

Women should always inform their physician and radiographer if there is any possibility that they are pregnant. Many imaging tests are not performed during pregnancy so as not to expose the foetus to radiation. If an x-ray is necessary, precautions will be taken to minimize radiation exposure to the baby.