

A facet joint injection is used to inject medication into a particular facet joint in the spine.

The facet joint connects the inferior articular process of the vertebra above and with the superior articular process of the vertebra or sacrum below. A facet joint can be a source of back pain.

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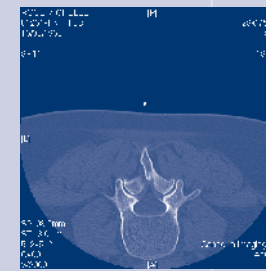
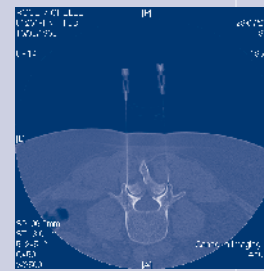
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# Facet Joint Injection

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A facet joint injection can be diagnostic, to determine the pain source, or therapeutic, to provide ongoing pain relief. If the injection relieves the pain, then the injection site is the source of the pain. Once the source of the pain is known, treatment options can be considered.

## Medications injected include:

- bupivacaine or marcaine - a slower acting and longer lasting local anaesthetic.
- cortisone - a strong long lasting anti-inflammatory. It can take several days to work, but its effect can last for months.

## Indications for facet joint injection

Facet joint injections are used if the facet joints are irritated or inflamed, often by facet joint degeneration. This degeneration can occur in isolation, or as a result of degenerative disc disease.

## Before facet joint injection

You can have a light meal a few hours before the injection. You should take your routine medications, but stop any pain relievers or anti-inflammatory medication for the day. You need to have some pain, so you can assess whether the injection gives you any pain relief.

**Please bring any relevant films and your referral to your appointment.**

## Technique

You may be sitting or lying on your side with your back exposed. The skin on your back will be cleaned. A small needle will be used to inject some local anaesthetic under the skin. This will sting for a few seconds before causing numbness. The facet needle is inserted from behind, between two vertebra, into the facet joint space. CT is used to guide the needle into the facet joint. The medication is injected, and if the facet joint is the source of pain, the pain will reduce. The needle is then removed. The entire process takes 10 to 30 minutes.

## Risks of facet joint injection

The risks associated with a facet joint injection include:

- Pain at the injection site. This usually settles quickly.
- Worse back pain
- Bleeding
- Infection at the skin puncture site or deeper within the facet joint. This is very rare.
- Steroid side effects include fluid retention, local skin pigmentation, increased blood pressure or blood sugar, mood swings, insomnia, or transient immunity decrease.

## No smoking

Smoking damages every part of your body and decreases the chance of a successful operation. If you smoke, you should stop now.

## Expectations of a facet joint injection

Immediately after the injection, you should feel that your pain is much less, due to the local anaesthetic. After a few hours, your pain will return and you may have a "sore back" for a couple of days. This is due to the needle insertion and irritation from the steroid. You should notice pain relief commencing around five days after the injection.

Fifty percent of patients experience good temporary relief from a facet joint injection. More than half of these patients have long term relief up to one year.

## Rehabilitation after facet joint injection

Your rehabilitation will require the following -

- You will spend sometime in the recovery room before being discharged.
- You will be able to walk immediately after the procedure, although you may experience leg weakness, numbness or tingling for a few hours.
- You may have slight bruising from the needle. This will settle with simple pain relief.
- You should arrange to have someone drive you home.
- You will be able to resume your normal activities the following day, as pain allows. You can remove the bandaid and wash as usual.

Canberra Imaging Group strongly advise that you return to your referring doctor in order for your doctor to discuss your radiology report with you.