

{PRIVATE}Lumbar Facet Joint Injection FAQs

What are lumbar facet joints?

Lumbar facet joints are small joints a little larger than the size of the thumbnails located in pairs on the back of the spine. They provide stability and guide motion in the low back. If the joints become damaged or inflamed, they can cause pain primarily in the low back, and occasionally in the abdomen, buttocks, groin or legs. Low back pain from facet disease is usually made worse with twisting or bending backwards.

Why are facet joint injections helpful?

A facet joint injection serves several purposes. First, the injection can be diagnostic. By placing numbing medicine into the joint, the amount of immediate pain relief experienced may help confirm or deny the joint as a source of low back pain. Second, the injection can be therapeutic-it can reduce pain. The anti-inflammatory steroid injected with the numbing medicine can help to reduce any inflammation that may exist within the joint(s), and thus help relieve lumbar pain.

What happens during the procedure?

The patients are placed on the X-ray table on their stomach in such a way that the physician can best visualize these joints in the back using x-ray guidance, although ultrasound guidance is gaining popularity. The skin on the low back is scrubbed using sterile scrub (soap). Next, the physician numbs a small area of skin with numbing medicine. This medicine stings for several seconds. After the numbing medicine has been given time to be effective, the physician directs a very small needle, using x-ray guidance into the joint. A small amount of contrast (dye) may be injected to insure proper needle position inside the joint space. Then, a small mixture of numbing medicine (anesthetic) and anti-inflammatory (cortisone/steroid) is injected. One or several joints may be injected depending on location of the pain. Rather than injection inside the joint, sometimes the area just outside the joint is injected to minimize damage to the facet joint.

What happens after the procedure?

Immediately after the procedure, the patient will get up and be asked to ambulate try to imitate something that would normally bring about their usual low back pain. Patients may be asked to report the percentage of pain relief and record the relief experienced during the next week on a post injection evaluation sheet ("pain diary").

The leg(s) may feel weak or numb for a few hours. This is fairly uncommon, but does occasionally happen.

General Pre/Post Instructions

Patients can eat a light meal within a few hours before the facet injection. If a patient is an insulin dependent diabetic, they must not change their normal eating pattern prior to the procedure. Patients may take their routine medications. (i.e. high blood pressure and diabetic medications). If a patient is on Coumadin or any blood thinners including aspirin or are diabetic they must notify the office so the timing of these medications can be explained. These procedures are performed at Newport Center for Special Surgery. A driver must accompany the patient and be responsible for getting them home. No driving is allowed the day of the procedure. Patients may return to their normal activities the following day.

For more information, go to www.newportpain.com or call Newport Pain Management at 949 759-8400.