

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PROCEDURE

LUMBAR FACET INJECTION

How we do the procedure

A lumbar facet block is done to treat inflammation of the facet joint which can cause low back, hip and buttock pain. The lumbar facet joint is often involved in a rotational back injury or after back surgery, especially back fusions. The block can be performed at any level of the back. You will be lying face down on the procedure table with a pillow under your abdomen. Your back will be cleansed with Betadine and a sterile drape will cover the area. After the area is numbed with local anesthetic, a small needle is inserted alongside the spine and advanced to the position of the specific facet joint to be blocked, either by inserting the needle into the joint or by blocking the nerve that takes care of sensation from the joint. We will use an x-ray (fluoroscope) machine to guide needle placement. Once in position, a local anesthetic agent is injected to numb the nerves in the joint. Occasionally, a steroid (NOT the kind that increases muscle size in athletes) is injected into the joint.

What to expect

As soon as the doctor has completed the injection, the Nursing staff will begin asking you for your pain score. With the local anesthetic injection, it is possible that you may notice a numb area on your back, hip or buttocks. This injection is primarily diagnostic, to determine whether your pain is caused by facet joint arthritis. Once the local anesthetic has worn off, typically after several hours, your pain may return. If steroids are used, you can expect additional pain relief in 1-5 days. We will repeat this injection in two weeks. Depending on your response to the two facet injections, you may be a candidate for a facet rhizotomy or radiofrequency approach to cauterize the facet nerves. This new technique has a good chance of giving you long-term relief of your pain, up to two years. If no substantial effects are obtained after one or two injections, we will discuss other alternatives.

Risks

The risks include bleeding, infection and a reaction to any of the medications used for the procedure. We use sterile technique to avoid infections. If you are taking a "blood thinner" (anticoagulant), we will give you special instructions before the procedure to avoid excess bleeding.

You could experience a spinal headache, but this is rare and easily treated.

Safety Precautions

Since your ability to drive may be impaired for a few hours, we ask that you have someone drive you home.

Injected steroids occasionally cause nervousness, difficulty sleeping, a flushed feeling (like hot flashes), and increase in appetite, an elevated blood sugar, or a "moon face" (round face) for several days. (Steroids are used occasionally for this procedure.)