

Facet Joint injection information

Why am I having facet joint injections?

Facet joints are small joints about the size of your thumb nail which are located in pairs on the back of your spine. When the joints are irritated they may cause pain in both the immediate area or referred pain in other areas. Depending on which joints are affected this may occur in your neck, back, abdomen, buttocks, groin or legs. By giving you this injection the doctor will be able to tell whether or not this is the source of your pain. In addition you may experience a prolonged period of pain relief.

What is a facet joint injection?

The procedure involves the injection of a local anaesthetic (a numbing medicine) and an anti-inflammatory drug into the joint. After numbing the skin, the doctor will insert a fine needle into the joint. This is done using X-rays to ensure that the doctor is injecting the medication into precisely the correct place. There will be more than one injection into the joint.

What will I be able to do afterwards?

After 30 minutes you should be able to walk and then go home. Before you go we will ask you to describe your pain on a scale of 1-10. On occasion your leg may feel temporarily numb or weak for a few hours and this is you should have someone with you. Do not walk without assistance if this happens. You may have an ache at the injection site for a few days, and once the local anaesthetic wears off it can be five days before you obtain pain relief from the anti-inflammatory drug. Do not drive or drink alcohol for twenty-four hours after the procedure. You may resume your normal level of activity the following day and should be able to return to work, although some people may experience a temporary increase in pain.

It is important to realise that any relief obtained from this procedure should be used to gradually increase your activity levels. It is also important to realise that your own daily exercise programme is for life and stopping it will usually cause the pain and stiffness to return.

Are there any risks involved?

There is an element of risk involved in all the procedures and treatments that you may have at the pain clinic. However you should remember that these risks are usually minimal. Your doctor will discuss these fully before your procedure and will be happy to answer all your questions.

Who should I contact if I need help afterwards?

You can contact the Pain Clinic on between 9-2pm, Monday to Friday. Outwith these hours you should contact your GP or NHS 24. Before you leave we will give you a letter for your GP, which you should hand in to your surgery a few days after the procedure. If you need help overnight or at the weekend then take this letter with you so that the doctor will know what you have had done.