

Facet Joint Injection

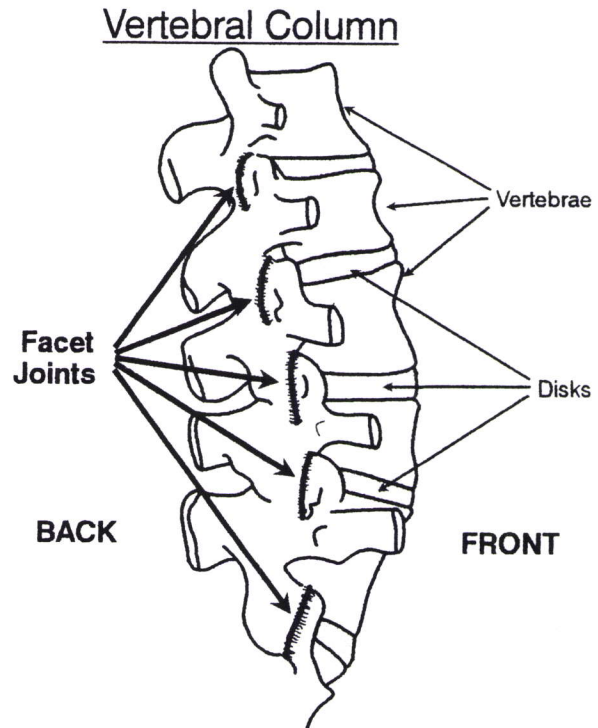
Neck or Back pain may be caused by problems with your **facet joints**. If so, a facet joint injection may help. The injection may help the doctor diagnose or identify a problem joint. The injection is also used to help relieve the pain.

What Is a Facet Joint?

The bones in our spine are called **vertebrae**. On the back of each vertebra are flat surfaces (**facet joints**) where each vertebra touches the next vertebra above and below it.

What Is a Facet Joint Injection?

With injury or age, the facet joints may become inflamed and painful. During a facet joint injection, an anti-inflammatory medication is injected into the inflamed joint. This treatment helps to reduce inflammation and relieve pain. The improvement may last for months or even longer. If the inflammation returns, the injection may be repeated. If the improvement is significant, but short lasting, the nerves to the joint themselves may be numbed for a longer period of time by a procedure using concentrated radio waves.



The Procedure

The treatment is done as an outpatient at a hospital or surgery center. During your treatment:

- The skin over the injection site is cleaned with an antiseptic. A tiny needle the size of a hair is used to administer a local anesthetic which numbs the skin and underlying tissues.
- Fluoroscopy (x-ray imaging) will be used to help the doctor visualize your spine. Sometimes a contrast "dye" is used.
- Using another tiny needle, the injection is given. It usually contains a local anesthetic and a corticosteroid (a medication that reduces inflammation).

After the Procedure

Most patients are able to go home within 10 to 30 minutes after the procedure. The anesthetic wears off in a few hours. When it does, your neck or back may temporarily feel more uncomfortable than usual. This is normal. Take it easy for the rest of the day. The corticosteroid (anti-inflammatory medication) may take 2 to 5 days to begin to work.

When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Severe headaches
- Fever over 101°, redness or drainage at the injection site
- Weakness in your arms or legs

Risks and Complications

Risks and complications are rare, but can include:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Prolonged increase in pain
- Nerve damage (very rare)

Precautions

Because of the risk of bleeding, people who are on anticoagulants (Coumadin, Warfarin) should not receive an injection.

The Corticosteroid

The anti-inflammatory medication is a synthetic cortisone-type medication called Depomedrol. Despite rumors to the contrary, the synthetic cortisone-type medications, in the doses used for facet injections, are very safe and are unlikely to cause permanent problems. Aside from the first few minutes from the local anesthetic, the injection will not cover up or “mask” your pain.