

# Facet Joint Injection or Medial Branch Block

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## What are facet joints?

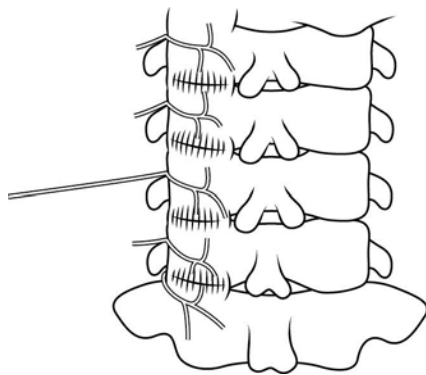
The facet joints in your spinal column provide stability and guide motion in your neck, middle and lower back. These joints are about the size of your thumbnail. If the joints become excessively stressed, irritated or inflamed, you may develop pain in your head, neck, shoulders, low back, groin, buttocks or legs.

A facet block is an injection that is done as a test to determine whether a specific facet joint or joints in the spine are responsible for your pain symptoms. Although they can be an effective means of providing pain relief, the benefits tend not to last too long. They are intended to be used more as a test than for pain relief.

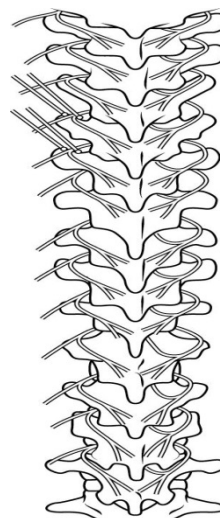
Facet blocks are usually done to see if a rhizotomy would help relieve your pain. A rhizotomy is an x-ray guided procedure where heat is applied to the nerves supplying the joint(s) responsible for your pain. The heat causes a lesion which interrupts the pain pathway.

## About the injection

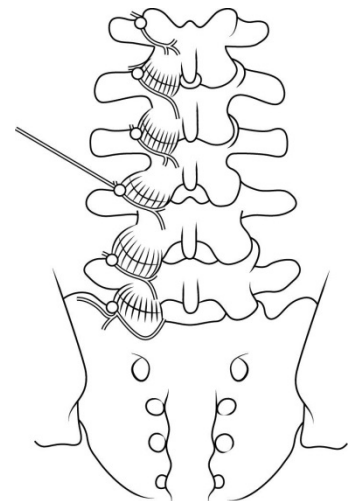
Facet block is an injection of local anesthetic into the nerves surrounding the facet joint. A needle is placed near the joint. The injection is guided with an x-ray. Dye may be used to make sure the needle is in the right spot. Please let the doctor know if you have an allergy to contrast dye.



Cervical



Thoracic



Lumbar

## Before your appointment

- If you are unwell, have a fever or are on antibiotics please call us at the Michael G. De Groot Pain Clinic – 905-521-2100, extension 44621.
- Eat a light meal, breakfast or lunch within a few hours of your appointment.
- Come to the Pain Clinic 30 minutes before your scheduled appointment. An x-ray will be taken. If you are of child-bearing age, let us know if you could be pregnant.
- **Arrange to have a ride home.** You will be in the Pain Clinic for about 90 minutes.

## Medication

- **Please check with your doctor for specific instructions on what pain medications you may be allowed to take before to the injection.**
- If you are taking blood thinning and/or antiplatelet medications, ask the doctor or nurse for instructions, **at least 2 weeks before the procedure.**
- If you are an insulin dependent diabetic, do not change your normal eating patterns and take your routine medications
- Bring a list of your medications to your appointment.

## When you first arrive for your appointment

- You will be asked to complete a pain level questionnaire.
- You may need to change into a patient gown.
- Please talk with the nurse if there has been any change in the pain that you are having, medications you are taking and your activity level.
- Your blood pressure will be checked.
- Sign your consent form.
- You may need to have an IV (intravenous) started.
- Walk with a nurse into the procedure room.

**It is very important that you are aware and understand fully the risks and benefits of the procedure before a decision is made.**

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## During the injection

A nurse will be with you at all times during the procedure. You will lie on a stretcher on your stomach (for a back injection) or side (for neck injection). Your blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen level will be checked. Pillows may be used for positioning and comfort.

The skin on your back/neck will be cleansed with an antiseptic. The doctor may freeze a small area of skin with numbing medicine. A needle is inserted into the joint or nerve supplying the joint. X-rays are taken for needle positioning which may be painful, especially if placed right near the facet joints. Local anesthetic will be injected by the doctor into the joint near the nerves in the area of your pain.

## After the injection

- You will remain in the recovery area for about 30 minutes. A nurse will check you and your blood pressure.
- You may move and change position for comfort.
- You will be given a pain diary to document your pain level after the injection. You will need to bring the pain diary back to the Pain Clinic.
- A nurse will show you how to complete the pain diary. You should try to do any activities that reproduce your pain. This will help to indicate the success of the facet injection.

## When you get home

- Remove your bandage when you go to bed.
- Do not soak in a tub bath, swimming pool or hot tub for 24 hours after the injection.
- Use ice packs for discomfort. Keep the ice pack on for only 20 minutes every hour, if needed.
- You can get back to your normal activities and exercises the next day.
- Discuss with your doctor when you can start taking your pain medication again.

## Side effects

- Pain, numbness, itchiness or a burning sensation may occur at the injection site.
- Backache – apply ice to the injection site for 20 minutes every hour if needed. Wrap the ice pack in a towel before you apply it.
- Bruising, soreness, and swelling at the injection sites may occur and should be temporary.
- If you have your neck facet joints injected you may feel unsteady or shaky. These feelings are temporary and usually go away in 30 to 60 minutes. It is not a good idea to look down or sideways. Please be sure that you have a ride home after the injections.

## Emergency

- Go to Emergency if you have progressive numbness or loss of sensation within 12 hours of your injection.

## Call the Pain Clinic if you have:

- a severe headache
- a fever greater than 38°C or 100.4°F
- redness at the injection site
- severe back pain
- new numbness or severe weakness in the days after your injection

**Michael G. DeGroote Pain Clinic  
McMaster University Medical Centre  
905-521-2100, extension 44621**