

WHAT IS A FACET INJECTION/ MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCK?



A facet injection, also known as a medial branch block, is designed to identify the source of spinal pain. There are many components to the spine that could be injured and causing pain. One of the most common causes of pain is facet joints. This treatment's goal is to determine if the patient's pain is from arthritic facet joints.

A facet injection is a diagnostic tool; pain relief may vary from minimal to complete elimination of pain. This relief may only last a few hours. The purpose of this procedure is not to provide long lasting pain relief, but to identify if arthritic facet joints are the source of a patient's pain.

■ HOW DOES A FACET INJECTION RELIEVE MY PAIN?

Facet arthritis means the joints of the spine are inflamed. Nerves in the spinal cord transmit pain impulses when this occurs. A facet injection will block these impulses, thus reducing pain. Medications used during this procedure may include local anesthetics and an anti-inflammatory drug. These drugs and this procedure have a long record of safety and effectiveness, although there are always a minority of patients who respond poorly to such treatment.

■ WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THIS PROCEDURE?

After patient check-in, a nurse will take the patient's full medical history and, if appropriate, start an IV. Prior to the procedure, patients have an opportunity to have

any questions answered by a member of the Colorado Pain Care's team. Once the patient is prepared, he or she will be placed on the treatment table and intravenous sedation will begin, if so prescribed. The injection takes only a few minutes. Afterward, the patient will be brought into a recovery area to rest for 30 minutes before being discharged. Sedated patients will not be allowed to drive home; patients are required to arrange transportation before the procedure. Taxicabs are not allowed unless there is a responsible adult to accompany the patient home with the cab driver.

■ WHEN WILL I BEGIN TO FEEL PAIN RELIEF AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Within several hours of the injection, most patients report pain relief. The most important aspect of this diagnostic procedure is for the patient to monitor and record pain levels for the first five hours afterward, while the pain impulse numbing medication is still in effect. The duration of the pain relief varies; the severity of the issue and the patient's health are both factors.

■ WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED RECOVERY FROM THE PROCEDURE?

Recovery from the facet injection is prompt. Minor discomfort at the injection site is a common side effect, but is usually resolved within 24 hours. Patients who experience additional symptoms are recommended to review instructions provided at discharge, including scheduling a follow-up appointment if necessary.