

Department of anaesthesia and pain medicine

## Facet joint injection

### **What is a facet joint of the spine injection?**

A facet joint injection is an injection of a mixture of local anaesthetic and steroids into a facet joint. The facet joints are small weight-bearing joints located in pairs in the spine, from the neck to the lower back. The local anaesthetic in the mixture helps to relieve the pain and the steroid reduces the inflammation. The procedure is carried out carefully under x-ray control to ensure that the injection is in the right place. The injection is given to several of the affected facets at any one time. The injection can be given at the back of the neck or back depending on the site of pain.

### **Why is the injection given?**

Some of your pain may come from stress in the facet joints. The local anaesthetic and steroid mixture should act on the nerves supplying these joints and help to reduce the pain and inflammation from the joint. Reducing the pain should improve the quality of your life and can help you perform back strengthening exercises, which is the best way to improve the function of the back over the longer term.

### **How is the injection done?**

We will ask you to come to the surgical day case unit (SDCU, department 4) and a nurse will escort you to the operating theatre. We will ask you to lie on your front. During the procedure, the doctor will mark the injection site/s and inject local anaesthetic to numb the skin. He will insert needle/s into your back. The doctor will confirm the position of the needle/s with the help of an x-ray machine. A mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid is injected into the facet joint/s. Usually several joints are injected at the same time.

### **What are the benefits of this treatment?**

The facet joint injections are helpful in some people with chronic backache due to wear and tear of facet joints. The pain relief may take days or weeks to take effect and may not be 100% complete. Some people may not get any relief at all. The effectiveness of the block is difficult to predict. For some patients the injection helps by reducing the number of painkillers that are needed to control the pain.

### **What are the side effects?**

You may get some injection site pain after the procedure and, at first, have some increase in your pain. It is usually short term and easily controlled with painkillers. There may be some local bruising and tenderness on your skin. Some patients may experience numbness at the injection site.

### **Potential side effects with use of steroids**

There are very few side effects with single or occasional use of steroid injections. Sometimes people have hot flushes, feel sick or have mild abdominal pain. Control of diabetes may be difficult and you may have irregular periods. These settle in a few days.

### **Advice and precautions**

- You will need to stay in the hospital for at least an hour after the procedure.
- If there is long-lasting numbness, you may have to stay in hospital overnight.
- A follow-up appointment will be arranged, so that the doctor or nurse can review the effects of the block.
- You should carry on with your normal activities. Try to increase exercises and your activity level, and aim to reduce your painkillers if the injection appears to have been successful.
- If there are any concerns or queries please contact the pain clinic.

### **It is very important to tell your doctor or secretary of the pain clinic, at least a week before the injection if:**

- you are allergic to any medications
- you are on blood thinning medication such as Warfarin, Nicoumalone (Sinthrome), Aspirin, Fondaparinux, Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- you have an infection at the injection site
- you have had a recent steroid / cortisone injection in the hospital or at the GP's surgery
- you think you might be pregnant
- you are a diabetic on insulin; your blood sugar may be difficult to control for a few days tending to be high
- you have had a recent heart attack or vaccination, please contact the pain clinic.

### **Contacts**

Pain secretary on **0161 446 8493**

### **Pain team**

Dr Julian Scott-Warren, consultant in pain medicine & anaesthesia

Jennifer Nuttall, pain nurse specialist

Shiji Thomas, acute pain nurse

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

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