



## **Facet (Zygapophyseal) joint injection**

### **What are the facet joints?**

Facet joints (cervical, lumbar, and at times, thoracic) are often implicated in patients with low back pain. These joints are diarthrodial joints with chondral surfaces, synovium, and meniscoid tissue. As such, they are susceptible to inflammation, chondral damage, and degeneration over time. It is estimated that as many as 15-30% of patient with low back pain have pain that originates from these joints. It is not uncommon to have a number of pain patterns when describing the pain from these joints. Oftentimes patients will describe the pain as a deep, dull, constant ache or any combination of the above. The pain can be over the mid-line of the back and neck and oftentimes will involve the shoulders and upper back (if cervical/neck facet joints are causing pain) as well as into the hips, buttocks, and down the legs at times (for lumbar facet joints).

### **Preparing for the injection**

Refer to the pre-procedural paperwork that was given out during your office visit prior to leaving. This packet will cover the important aspects of preparation for the injection. Sedation is generally not needed for this procedure as it is very quick and the area is numbed prior to inserting any needles.

### **What to expect**

When you arrive at the ASC (surgery center) for your injection you will be "checked in" by the nurses at the center. You will be asked about your past medical history, medications you are taking, and vital signs will be taken. If you were on a blood thinner called Coumadin (warfarin) a sample will be obtained in order to ensure that your levels are appropriate for the injection as this medication should have been stopped 5 days prior to the injection date. This portion takes time so it is important that you show up early for this to be completed.

You will then be taken back to the operating room where you will lay on your stomach for the procedure. The fluoroscopy unit (x-ray) will be positioned over you in order to identify the important anatomical landmarks for the procedure. When the correct position is identified your skin will be "numbed" with a very small needle and local anesthetic. This usual is very short lived. When the skin is anesthetized the doctor will advance a very small needle into the facet joints with the help of the x-ray for guidance. You may notice some discomfort as the needle traverses the deep muscles next to the spine but again this is short lived. The medicine is then placed into/around the facet joints. This



medication is usually a combination of a local anesthetic and steroid. After this is completed the needles will be removed and you will be taken to the recovery room where you will wait for 15-30 minutes in order to monitor you. Depending on how many joints are involved and if both sides are being injected the procedure itself could take anywhere from 3-10 minutes. You will be asked how your pain is doing after the procedure. The local anesthetic will make the area feel good for several hours but eventually "wears off". The steroid can take **7-10 days** to start to work but some patients notice relief sooner.

### **After your injection**

Apply ice as needed to the area for the first 24-48 hours as this may help with some of the pain from the needle entry. You are welcome to resume PT immediately unless instructed not to do so by another provider. You will be given a sheet of paper discussing the procedure and the medications used. Most of the time you will be asked to be seen in the clinic within a few weeks to see the improvement you received with the injection.