



PROCEDURE INFORMATION

CERVICAL MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCK

FOR NECK PAIN AND HEADACHE

A cervical facet injection is a simple procedure for treating headaches, and neck, shoulder, upper back pain. This information sheet will explain what it is. Your doctor can also explain if this procedure is appropriate for you.

WHAT ARE CERVICAL FACET JOINTS?

Facet joints connect the vertebrae, the bones of the spine. They help guide your spine when you move. The neck area of the spine is called the cervical region. It contains 7 vertebrae.

Facet joints are found on both sides of the spine. Each is about the size of a thumbnail. Cervical facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. The right C3-4 facet joint, for example, joins the third and fourth vertebrae on the right side.

WHAT IS CERVICAL FACET JOINT PAIN?

You may feel pain if a cervical facet joint is injured. Sometimes it feels like simple muscle tension. Other times it can be severe pain.

The cartilage inside the joint may be injured. Other times only connecting ligaments surrounding the joints are injured.

Facet pain also depends on which facet joint is affected. Cervical facet pain can occur in an area from your head down to your shoulder blade. The diagram shows areas of pain usually associated with specific joints.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE CERVICAL FACET PAIN?

If you have pain in one or more of these areas when you turn your head, and it lasts longer than 2 months, you may have cervical facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRIs may not show if a facet joint is causing pain.

WHAT IS A CERVICAL MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCK?

In a cervical medial branch block, an anesthetic is injected near the medial branch nerve. This stops the transmission of pain signals from the facet joints.

If this reduces your pain and helps you move your neck like normal, it tells the doctor which facet joint is causing the pain.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN INJECTION?

The injection may start with an IV (medicine given intravenously) to help you relax. A local anesthetic may be used to numb your skin.

The doctor will insert a thin needle near the medial branch nerve. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, may be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. A dye may also be injected to ensure the needle is in the correct location.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER AN INJECTION?

You will be monitored for up to 30 minutes after the injection. When you are ready to leave, the clinic will give you the discharge instructions. You will also be given a pain diary. It is important to fill this out because it helps your doctor know how the injection is working.

It may help to move your neck in ways that hurt before the injection, to see if the pain is still there, but do not overdo it. Take it easy for the rest of the day.

You may feel immediate pain relief and numbness in your neck for up to 6 hours after the injection. This tells you the medication has reached the right location.

You can usually return to work the next day, but always check with your doctor.

CONTINUED ON REVERSE...

CERVICAL MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCK

HOW LONG CAN I EXPECT PAIN RELIEF?

How long you can expect relief depends on how many areas are injured, and on the amount of inflammation.

If your pain goes away for a short time, but then returns, you may be a candidate for radiofrequency ablation (RFA) to the medial branch nerve. This procedure provides a more permanent disruption of pain signals.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS?

As with all invasive medical procedures, there are potential risks. Risks are rare, but may include infection, bleeding, allergic reaction, headache, dural puncture, temporary numbness or tingling, weakness, and nerve injury.

Side effects are rare and, when they occur, are usually due to the steroid itself. These include, but are not limited to, pain at the injection site, headache, increased blood sugar, water retention, facial flushing, irritability, sleeplessness, burst of energy, and skin discoloration at the injection site.

You should contact your doctor or go to the emergency room if you experience any of the following symptoms: Severe headaches with nausea or vomiting, fever greater than 101°F, loss of control of bowel or bladder function, severe pain, and/or loss of function or feeling in the arms or legs.

THIS PAMPHLET IS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION ONLY. SPECIFIC QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS SHOULD ALWAYS BE DIRECTED TO YOUR PROVIDER. YOUR PROVIDER CAN EXPLAIN POSSIBLE RISKS OR SIDE EFFECTS AND OTHER READILY AVAILABLE TREATMENT OPTIONS