

## **Patient Information - Facet Joint Injections**

### **What is a facet joint injection?**

The human spine is made up of a number of bones stacked up on top of each other, these bones are called vertebrae. They are joined together and supported by ligaments and muscles. The little joints that link the vertebrae together are known as facet joints. They help to stabilise your spine and allow movement. Facet joints occur in pairs along the length of the spine. The ones that cause the most problems are the ones in the neck (cervical facet joints) or the ones in the lower back (lumbar facet joints). There may be a problem in more than one set of joints due to wear and tear, injury, inflammation (tissue response to irritation) or previous disc problems.

A facet joint injection is an injection of local anaesthetic (with or without steroid) either directly into or around the joint, or around the small nerve that supplies the joint. It is usual to do several injections at one time. The injection is used as a test procedure to see if the pain is actually arising from the joint or the nerve itself. If the injection helps the pain a longer lasting procedure may be offered to you at a later date.

### **Benefits**

Some patients will experience good pain relief from the procedure. Although the facet joint injection may not provide long term relief of symptoms all the time, it can be helpful to your doctor in deciding whether to offer you a different (denervation) procedure which can provide pain relief for a longer period.

### **Risks**

Unfortunately no procedure is risk free. Short term side effects include pain and discomfort at the site of the injection, infection, bruising and bleeding. There is a possibility that you may have an allergic reaction to the drugs used. The local anaesthetic can spread and cause some numbness in the buttocks and legs. This is temporary and will resolve. Long term effects are uncommon and include the possibility of an increase in pain, permanent neurological problems such as numbness and weakness.

### **Before the procedure**

- You will have the treatment as a day case.
- You will be sent an appointment to attend the surgical day unit.
- You should arrange for someone to drive you home after your injection.
- Your stay may vary between two to four hours.
- Please bring a list of your current medications with you.
- You will be asked to undress and put on a theatre gown (you can keep your underwear on).
- Your doctor will discuss the procedure with you and ask you to sign a consent form. As the procedure involves the use of x-rays female patients will be asked for details of their last menstrual period. If there is any possibility that you may be pregnant please inform the doctor or nurse.

### **The procedure**

- The procedure is carried out under x-ray screening. This allows the doctor to identify the specific level of the facet joint to be treated.
- Once you are in the correct position the doctor will clean your neck / back with an antiseptic solution which may feel cold.

- A local anaesthetic is injected in the skin at the site of the facet injection. This may sting initially, before the skin goes numb.
- It is important that you keep still during the procedure as the needle will be carefully inserted under x-ray control into the correct position. You may feel a pushing sensation or some discomfort at this stage.
- Once the needle is in the correct position the doctor will inject the local anaesthetic/ steroid. A feeling of tightness may be felt; you should tell the doctor if you feel pain.
- A small dressing may be placed over the site of the injection. This can be removed in the evening.

### **Following the procedure**

- After the procedure you will be taken to an area to recover.
- The nursing staff will observe you before going home.
- Please be careful when you first get out of the trolley – ensure you are steady on your feet.
- Take your regular medication and pain killers as normal.
- There can be an initial exacerbation of discomfort before you start experiencing the pain relief. During this period, you may need to increase your pain killers or require stronger pain killers. Please see your GP if current pain medicines are inadequate.
- A letter will be sent to your GP and a further appointment at the pain clinic will be sent to you.

**Please ensure that you have arranged for someone to drive you home after this procedure.**

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. If you require more information or have any questions, please speak to your doctor prior to the consent for the procedure.