



Facet Injection/Block

FACET SYNDROME

Facet syndrome cannot be diagnosed by x-ray, CT scan, MRI, Bone scan, or any other radiology process. It is suspected on physical exam by tenderness directly over the facet joint, experiencing pain on extension (bending backwards), and on your history. The diagnosis is made by injecting a local anesthetic, with or without a steroid, to the painful area or around the nerve that goes to this area. If your pain is relieved by this injection you may benefit from another procedure called **Radiofrequency Denervation/Rhizotomy/Ablation/Neurolysis**.

Because facets are joints, they can develop arthritis due to injuries, excessive bone formations, thickening, damage to the fibrous capsule that surrounds the facets, or damage to the cartilage inside the joints. Certain types of activity may encourage the development of facet syndrome. If you are over 45 or your job has involved lifting for a number of years, you are more likely to develop facet syndrome. Whiplash injuries often involve pain facet joints.

WHAT ARE FACET JOINTS?

Facet joints link the bones of the spine together in the posterior (back) part of the spine. Two facet joints are present at each spinal segment. They are named for the spinal bones which they connect. For example, in the neck (cervical spine) the facet joints between Cervical #5 and Cervical #6 are called Cervical 5-6. The facet joints are important in restricting the motion of the cervical and lumbar spine. They allow motions of twisting, flexion, and extension.

WHY DO FACET JOINTS CAUSE PAIN?

Facet joints are possible sources of neck (cervical), mid-back (thoracic) and lower back (lumbar) pain. A small nerve that branches out from a spinal nerve provides sensation to the facet joint. Trauma or arthritic changes can cause the release of pain generating substances that sensitize the nerve endings located in the joint.

Facet joints can cause pain in one or both sides of the low back. It can be made worse with extension (bending backwards or twisting). The pain can also travel to the buttocks or back of the thighs. Patients with facet joint pain from the neck (cervical spine), can have neck pain, headaches, shoulder pain or shoulder pain.

WHAT IS A FACET JOINT BLOCK?

A facet joint block involves the injection of a medication into the facet joint or around the nerve to the facet joint. In a diagnostic block, a local anesthetic is used to determine if the injected area is causing the pain. In some cases a steroid is also injected. The purpose of facet joint blocks is twofold. The first is as a diagnostic block. If the patient receives an appropriate reduction in pain (as determined by the evaluation after the injection), there is an increased probability that the facet joint is an important component in the patient's pain syndrome. The block may then be repeated to confirm the diagnosis.

The Procedure

Patients undergoing facet joint injections may receive a sedative medication, but this is not required. This medication is given in order to relax you. The injection is performed in a procedure or operating room using fluoroscopy (x-ray) to insure proper needle placement and to



maximize safety. As you recover from the procedure, you may feel some tenderness at the site of injections and an ice pack may be placed for temporary relief of this discomfort. If used, the steroid injected around the facet joint may take 3-7 days to take effect. If the injection does not help, then the facet joint may not be the source of your pain. The patient will follow up with the physician on the next scheduled office visit (usually within one week) to determine if additional procedures may be needed for more long term pain relief.