

## **Facet Joint Injection and Medial Branch Block Information**

### **What are facet joints, and why are facet joint injections helpful?**

Facet joints are small joints located in pairs on each side of the vertebra in your neck and back. These joints provide stability and guide motion in your spine. If the joints become painful due to arthritis, injury or mechanical stress they can cause pain in various areas. A facet joint block is an injection of local anesthetic and an anti-inflammatory medication (cortisone) directly into the facet joint. A facet joint injection serves several purposes. It helps confirm if the facet joint is the main source of your pain and can relieve pain and inflammation. In a similar procedure known as a Medial Branch Block, the doctor injects local anesthetic into the adjacent nerves that supply the facet joints. This can provide additional diagnostic information.

### **How Should I prepare for the injection?**

Talk to your physician about medications and supplements you usually take. If you take blood thinners, ask for special instructions to stop them before the procedure.

### **What will happen to me during the procedure?**

The skin over your lower back will be well cleansed. Next, the physician will numb a small area of skin and underlying tissue with an injection of local anesthetic, which stings for a few seconds. Next, the physician will use x-ray guidance (fluoroscopy) to direct a larger needle into the facet joint. He will then inject several drops of contrast dye to confirm that the medicine is in the facet joint. Then, a small volume of local anesthetic plus anti-inflammatory medicine (cortisone) will then be injected. The procedure takes approximately 30 minutes. After the procedure, you may remain at the clinic for another 15-30 minutes.

### **What can I expect after the procedure?**

You may notice a slight increase in your pain lasting for several days as the numbing medicine wears off before the cortisone is effective. Icing the area can be helpful in the first 2-3 days after the injection. You may take your regular medicines after the procedure, but try to limit your pain medicines the first 4-6 hours after the procedure so that the diagnostic information obtained from the procedure is accurate. You may be referred for physical or manual therapy over the next several weeks while the cortisone is working. You may return to your usual level of activity the day after the injection. If possible, it is best not to perform any unnecessary or strenuous work, sport or hobby for 2-3 days after the injection while the medication is starting to work.

The cortisone may take 2-3 days to begin working. If your pain is improved, you may restart your regular exercise/activities/physical therapy 2 days after the injection. Even if you feel significantly improved, gradually increase your activities over 1-2 weeks to avoid recurrence of your pain.

After the procedure, you will report your remaining pain (if any) and also record the relief you experience during the next two weeks on a "pain diary" we will provide. Mail the completed pain diary back as directed so that your treating physician can be informed of your results and plan future tests and/or treatment if needed.