

WHAT IS A FACET JOINT INJECTION?

A cervical, thoracic or lumbar facet joint injection involves injecting a small amount of local anesthetic (numbing agent) and/or steroid medication, which can anesthetize the facet joints and block the pain. The pain relief from a facet joint injection is intended to help a patient better tolerate a physical therapy routine to rehabilitate his or her injury or back condition.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Infection: most of these are minor (1-2%), however they can be serious (<0.1%) requiring hospital admission, intravenous antibiotics and surgery.

Bleeding: this is fortunately also rare and common in patients with bleeding disorders and on "blood thinning" medications.

Nerve damage: from direct needle trauma, or as a consequence of the above-mentioned complications.

HOW DOES THE PROCEDURE WORK?

- Spinal injection procedures are completed with you lying face down on an x-ray table. We will ensure that you are as comfortable as possible.
- A series of planning images are performed, with the area of the needle entry planned on the computer terminal and then marked on your skin. Your skin will then be cleaned with an antiseptic wash and a local anesthetic will then be injected into the injection site. This may result in a temporary stinging sensation until the skin becomes numb (roughly 10-30 seconds).
- A fine needle is then passed through the skin and tissues, constantly manipulated under CT guidance until it enters the facet joint. Injecting a mixture of cortisone and local anesthetic into the facet joint decreases inflammation and therefore the cause of your pain. Some discomfort will be felt for a short time until the local anesthetic numbs the area.
- The effects of the treatment vary and it is difficult to predict the duration of pain relief until the procedure has been performed. In some people, pain is relieved for months, others years, and still for others it produces no relief at all. In the case of the latter, your provider may recommend an alternative treatment which may include radiofrequency ablation.

