

CT SCANNING DEPARTMENT

CT GUIDED FACET JOINT/NERVE ROOT INJECTIONS

What is a CT guided facet joint/nerve root injection?

The injection consists of a mixture of an anaesthetic and a long lasting steroid either into the facet joints or nerve roots of the spine. Facet joints are located in the back or neck at each vertebral level. They are paired (right and left) and are surrounded by a joint capsule. Nerve roots are also found at each vertebral level at which nerves leave the spinal cord. Depending on the nature of your symptoms, the doctor will know whether to inject at the facet joint or nerve root.

The steroid injected reduces inflammation at the site and thus reduces pain and other symptoms caused by inflammation.

Will the injection hurt?

The procedure is done under local anaesthetic. There will be some discomfort, like a bee sting, as the local anaesthetic is injected.

How long does the procedure take?

The complete examination takes approximately half an hour.

Preparation

- You can eat and drink as normal before the procedure however we do recommend that you do not have anything to eat for a couple of hours before your examination. This is to ensure that you are as comfortable as possible throughout your examination.
- If you have insurance, please ensure that you bring your policy number and have obtained an authorisation number. You will need this when you register.
- If you are in possession of a recent MRI scan you **must** bring it with you to your appointment. These scans are essential for the Radiologist to accurately plan your injection
- Please let the CT department know if you have any allergies before your examination

The day of the examination

- Please report to Patient Accounts (Main reception, Ground floor, South building) about ten minutes before your appointment time. One of the Accounts staff will register you onto the system. It is at this point you will need to supply your membership number and authorisation code. Once you are registered, the Accounts staff will direct around the corner to the Imaging Department. On arrival at the Imaging reception, one of the reception staff will notify the CT department of your arrival
- Once in the scanning room, the radiologist carrying out the procedure will talk to you about your symptoms and use your MRI scans to identify exactly where the injection will go. He will explain the procedure and ask you to sign a consent form. This is routine for all interventional procedures.
- You will then be positioned on the scanning table. If the injection is for the neck, you will lie on your back. If the injection is for the lower back you will lie face down. An external marker will then be placed over the region of interest and a limited scan will be taken of that area to find the correct position for the injection. The skin is then marked and the area cleaned. It is very important that you **do not move** until the end of your examination.
- The radiologist will then inject a small amount of local anaesthetic to numb the area. Once this has taken effect, he will place a longer needle into the site and another limited scan is taken. The needle may then need repositioning and another scan is taken
- Once the radiologist is happy that the tip of the needle is in the correct place, the injection will be given. This may cause a strange and uncomfortable stretching sensation which soon passes

What should I expect after the injection?

Immediately after the injection, you may feel that your pain may be gone or significantly less. This is due to the local anaesthetic and will last for a few hours. You may resume normal activity as soon as you feel able however you may experience numbness and tingling on the affected side for up to 12 hours after the procedure. For this reason you **must not drive** following your procedure and we advise that you bring someone with you to escort you home.

After the local anaesthetic has worn off you may experience a worsening of your usual symptoms. This is due to the mechanical process of needle insertion as well as

an initial irritation of the steroid itself. It may last for a couple of days. You should start noticing pain relief on the 3rd or 4th day after your procedure when the steroid begins to take effect. If pain persists beyond this time, an anti-inflammatory drug such as Ibuprofen is very effective at relieving the pain. You may also want to contact the CT department for additional advice.

How many injections do I need to have?

There is no guarantee that the treatment will be effective, but the majority of patients achieve good pain relief that can last several days too many months.

If the first injection does not relieve your symptoms in about a week or two, you may be recommended to have another. If you respond well to the first two injections but still have residual pain, you may be recommended for a third injection. This will be discussed with the radiologist.

In a six month period, we generally do not perform more than three injections. Giving more than three injections will increase the likelihood of side effects from the steroid (see below). Also, if three injections have not helped you much, it is unlikely that you will get any further benefit from additional injections. We recommend that you make an appointment to see the doctor or consultant that referred you for the injections to discuss a subsequent course of injections or a different procedure.

What are the risks and side effects?

This procedure is well-established and safe when performed in a controlled setting. However, with any interventional procedure there are risks, side effects and a possibility of complications.

Risks include infection, worsening of symptoms and bleeding. Please tell us before the procedure if you are taking any blood-thinning medication e.g. warfarin, aspirin

The most common side effect is temporary discomfort and numbness in the area injected. Side effects related to the steroid include: fluid retention, weight gain, increased blood sugar (mainly in diabetics), elevated blood pressure and mood swings. Fortunately these serious side effects are very rare.

Please bear in mind that your doctor or consultant has recommended you for this procedure because he/she believes that the potential benefits of an injection outweigh any potential complications.

Contacting us

If you have any questions about your examination or there is something you think we should be aware of prior to your procedure, please contact one of the CT team:

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