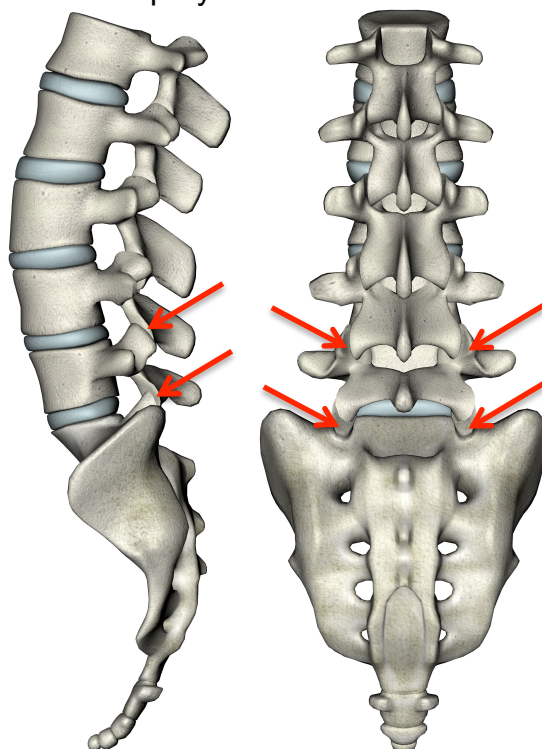


Lumbar Facet Joint Injections

You have been listed for an injection into the lumbar facet joints. You are likely to be complaining of pain in your low back, which may be caused by irritation or inflammation in the facet joints. The injections aim to reduce your pain and help to clarify where your back pain is coming from. The facet joints are the interlocking connections at the back of the spine and there is one on the right and left at each level. The facet joints are synovial joints. These are joints that have specialised lubricating fluid. They can develop osteoarthritis like the joints of the hip and knee. Pain from facet joint arthritis tends to occur at multiple levels of the spine. Unlike hip and knee replacements, which are very effective for treating the pain and stiffness of osteoarthritis affecting these joints, surgery for facet joint pain is unfortunately rarely effective.

About the Procedure

Facet joint injections are carried out as a day-case procedure and usually take around fifteen minutes to complete. They may be performed with you awake, or lightly sedated, in the orthopaedic operating theatres, the pain clinic or the radiology department. You will be asked to lie on a procedure table on your stomach and your skin will be cleaned with a cold antiseptic spray. Local anaesthetic will be injected into your skin to numb it. X-rays are then used to help guide needles into the facet joints (one needle per joint). This may reproduce your back pain. Usually between two and six joints will be injected. Sometimes it is difficult to inject people due to the presence of bony overgrowths at the tip of the joint, which prevents the needle from entering. Once the doctor is happy that the needle is in the right place, some local anaesthetic and steroid is injected into each joint. The needles are then removed and a cold adhesive spray or a small wound dressing is applied to the skin.



Before the Procedure

Wear loose comfortable clothing and arrange to have someone accompany you to and from the hospital. On average you could be in hospital between four and six hours on the day of the procedure. Please bring a list of all your medications including homeopathic and herbal remedies. You may bring your pain medication with you to take after the procedure.

You can take it up to two hours before the procedure with a sip of water. Please take all your routinely prescribed medications on the day of the procedure including blood pressure, heart, thyroid medications etc. Patients who take Warfarin need their INR blood test to be less than 1.5 on the day of the injection. Please seek advice from your GP with regard to your warfarin dose. The procedure will only be performed pending an INR check on admission. Patients who take Clopidogrel or Aspirin must stop taking it ten days prior to their injection. Again, please liaise with your GP regarding the safety of this.

If you are diabetic you may eat breakfast and take your morning dose of medication up to 6:00 am. Do not eat or drink for two hours prior to the procedure time (i.e. if your procedure time is 9 am, you can eat a light snack up until 07:00 am).

If you have had an MRI, CT scan or other imaging, outside the NHS, please bring copies with you. Without films, the physician will NOT perform the procedure.

You must be healthy on the day of the procedure. You cannot have a fever, infection, sore throat or cough.

Following the Procedure

You will be allowed home soon after the procedure but will need someone to take you. Please make sure you take any outside imaging (MRI / CT) home with you. You will need to be off work for 24 to 48 hours and you should not drive for at least 48 hours after the injection. Sometimes after the injection your back may feel stiff or numb for a few hours and it should return to normal. The injections can be uncomfortable but this is usually temporary and the pain should wear off. It is important to gradually return to your normal activities. A follow up appointment will be made for you to find out if the procedure has helped. This is usually six to eight weeks after the injection. It is important to keep a record of your symptoms and pain both on the day it was performed and over the following weeks.

Risks of the Injection

Lumbar facet joint injections have very few risks. Uncommon complications include infection, injury to the nerves or coating around the nerves near the facet joints, bleeding and allergic reaction. The steroid can affect blood sugar levels in people with diabetics, so blood sugar should be monitored more closely for a few days after the injection. Please contact a healthcare professional, the ward or your surgeons' secretary if you develop redness or swelling around the injection site, a high temperature or if you feel generally unwell.

Will it work?

The effectiveness of lumbar facet joint injections is variable and can depend on the underlying condition. For some people it can reduce their low back pain for weeks or months. Unfortunately, no treatment is guaranteed to work, and for some people the injections are not helpful. It can take a few weeks for the injection to work, so please be patient. It is very important to understand that as your back pain improves, after the injections, you will need to start a regular exercise program to strengthen the muscles around the spine, to work on your fitness, and to begin normal movement again. This combination of injection and exercise gives the best chance for long term improvement in your back complaint.