

Cardiff Spinal Clinic

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Facet Joint Injections/Medial Branch Blocks

Facet joint pain arises from a degenerative condition of the facet joints in the lumbar or cervical spine. Treatments include anti-inflammatory medication, physiotherapy, chiropractic care as well as activity modification.

It is possible to inject these joints both for diagnostic evaluation and for therapeutic pain improvement. These injections are done using x-ray guidance.

Before the procedure: it is usually done as an out-patient treatment under local anaesthetic, although sometimes sedation can be used. If you take blood thinning medication, please let my secretary know as I will need to know as well as the radiologist if it is done by them. We will need to work out, depending on which medication you take, with regards to how many days it needs to be stopped before the injection can be performed

During the procedure: you will be laying on your stomach on an x-ray table. The skin of your back will be cleaned and using x-ray guidance, needles will be placed down onto the facet joints and once confirmed that they are in the correct position then steroid and local anaesthetic will be injected. The procedure will take between five to twenty minutes.

After the procedure: you may well experience a warm feeling in your back. It is important to have somebody take you home as you will not be able to drive. The steroid in the injection will not be effective over the first twenty-four hours. You should restrict your activities for the first four to five days with regards to exercise, but you should be able to return to work the next day.

You would commonly be seen a month after the procedure to check on your response to treatment.

The risks of this procedure would be infection, haematoma, nerve injury and leakage of spinal fluid. These risks are very small, ie less than 1%.