

Facet Joint Injection Information

What is Facet Joint Syndrome?

Facet Syndrome, one of the most common causes of back pain, is a condition that affects the articular surface of joint either side vertebra and the inferior articular process of the vertebra above it. In facet syndrome the cartilage on these joint surfaces has deteriorated to the point where friction between the joints causes swelling, tenderness and pain. Often nerve impingement also occurs.

- ✓ Facet syndrome can occur anywhere throughout the spine but occurs most often (approximately 55% of cases) in the cervical (neck) vertebrae, and 31% of cases occur in the lumbar (lower back) vertebrae.
- ✓ The spinal column has bones that are linked by joints called facet joints, on each side. The facet joints help stabilize the spine, while also allowing movement.
- ✓ These joints may become painful either due to wear and tear (also called degenerative change) or injury. Pain is often felt in the lower back but may involve the buttocks and upper legs.
- ✓ Pain from facet joints in the neck can spread into the back of the head, the upper back, and shoulders. When the facet joints are tender and sensitive, the muscles nearby can become tight and painful.
- ✓ Facet syndrome is most often age related but can occur due to injury.

Who is at risk of developing facet Syndrome?

- ✓ Excessive use due to sports or other active lifestyles including extended periods of heavy labour
- ✓ Constant bending in the lower back, or upper arms
- ✓ Injuries from whiplash or even odd sleeping positions can injure your spine.
- ✓ Sudden jerking motion of the neck, improper lifting, or any other trauma to the spine can increase the risk of developing Facet Syndrome.
- ✓ Persons with a family history of facet syndrome are at higher risk.
- ✓ Being overweight increases your risk of developing facet Syndrome
- ✓ Disease: gout, arthritis, and infections increase the risk of developing Facet Syndrome.

What are the symptoms of facet syndrome?

The symptoms can vary but individuals notice one or more of the following

- a) Prolonged standing often increases pain levels in lower back.
- b) Pain that is more severe in the mornings and evenings, or with changes in weather such as cold and rainy weather.
- c) Neck pain radiating into the shoulders, arms, or head.
- d) Sitting for long periods and driving/riding in automobiles for long periods often increase pain levels.
- e) Headaches, usually occurring at the base of the skull, ringing in the ears (tinnitus), and aching behind the eyes.
- f) Weakness or numbness in your legs or arms, shooting pains, tingling sensations, dull achiness.
- g) The feeling of your bones grinding together when you move, often it seems as if you can actually hear this.
- h) Lower back pain that often radiates into the buttocks, pelvic region, and/or thighs.

What is a Facet Joint “Injection”?

This is an injection targeting the effected facet joints. More than one joint may need to be injected at the same time. It seeks to diagnosis and treat the issue at the same time

Typically the procedure involves the following steps:

- ✓ **This procedure takes about 10-20 minutes**
- ✓ **Sedation it is not used as you need to confirm the correct and safe position of the device in for your physician in order to maximise the long-term outcome.**
- ✓ **You will lie on an examination table and the area examined under x-ray guidance.**
- ✓ **The area’s to be injected will be cleansed with antiseptic solution then numbed with a local anaesthetic. This will help numb the area**
- ✓ **A needle will be inserted with x-ray guidance to ensure proper needle placement after which a mixture of local anaesthetic and steroids are injected.**
- ✓ **Once the needles are positioned you will be asked some simple questions about what you feel (pressure / pins & needles) in the affected area. This will help your consultant ensure the needle is in the best position to treat your pain**

- ✓ **Often the patient will experience immediate relief merely from the local anaesthetic, but this wears off in a few hours.**
- ✓ **After the injection the patient is placed in an observation area for 10-20 minutes to watch for adverse reactions.**
- ✓ **Once you are able to stand and walk you will be able to leave**

Important things to remember about your procedure

- a) Your buttock / legs may feel “heavy”. This is from the local anaesthesia. It will wear off gradually but walking may seem difficult.
- b) It is normal that the pain may increase in intensity over the first 4-7 days after the injection.
- c) Bruising may be present in the area where the injection was placed
- d) Infection is rare but if it feel hot /swollen please ask your GP to review.
- e) Allergy to injected medication is unusual.
- f) The steroid may result in facial flushing (redness), altered menstrual cycle, raised blood glucose level (if you are a diabetic) and sometimes insomnia.
- g) Generally you can return to light activity within 24 hours. Avoid excessive activity / heavy work for 48 hours after the procedure.
- h) Be sure to use you analgesics during this time to help recovery.
- i) Remember it may take 4 weeks before you feel any improvement

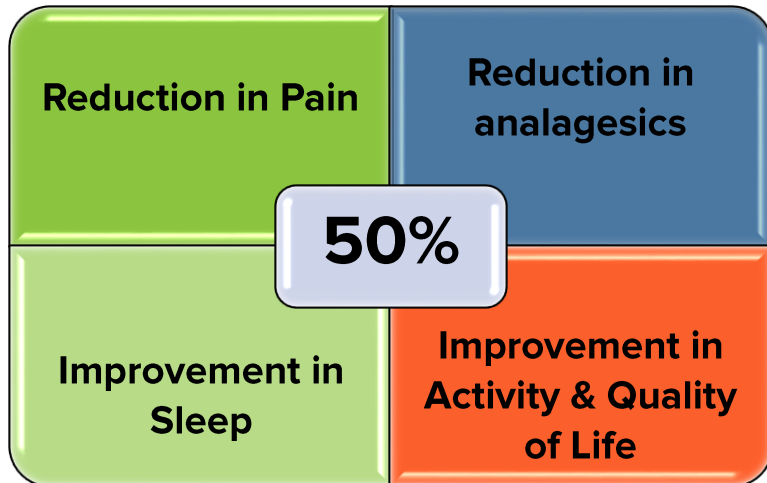
What risks or side effects are there?

- ✓ Physical therapy, non-opioid analgesics, acupuncture and other similar non-invasive treatments have very minimal to no risk; although soreness is common after a session and anti-inflammatory medications may irritate the stomach.
- ✓ Patients taking opioid analgesics are at risk of developing dependency or even addiction to the narcotic if the medication is abused.
- ✓ Facet joint injections have a few minor side effects, these include increased pain for 2-5 days post the procedure, bruising and swelling in the injection area, light bleeding at the injection site, tissue deterioration from the steroid over a period of time if the same location is injected repeatedly, and there is a small risk of infection if the injection site is not kept clean until it heals.

What are the long-term Goals?

Your consultant will give you guidance on what the expected outcome might be after your procedure.

In general, there can be a number of positive outcomes which might include



What should you do next?

If you feel you suffer this chronic pain please contact us and we can start to make a plan to help you get back in control

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Disclaimer: This information is to assist individuals understand the procedure and it should not replace the opinion of the pain consultant