

What are the potential risks with a facet joint block?

As with any invasive procedure there is the risk of infection and bleeding at the injection site. Very rarely nerve damage can occur.

What are the expected benefits of this treatment?

Pain relief should be noted immediately after the procedure. It may only last for the duration of the local anesthetic (four to six hours). In some patients the steroid that is injected may decrease pain for a prolonged period of time. It is common to have localized pain at the needle puncture site. Generally, ice applied to this area is helpful. This procedure is most effective when combined with other methods to control pain which may include physical therapy, medication management, weight loss, smoking cessation and other recommended interventions.

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Facet Joint Block

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What is a facet joint?

Facet joints are very much like finger joints that are located on each side of the spine at each disc level. These joints limit spinal movement and can cause pain after an injury or as they degenerate.

How does a facet joint block work?

When the spine is injured, diseased or degenerated the facet joints may be affected. These joints frequently become arthritic and painful. The resulting symptom is typically back pain which radiates into the legs to just above the knee. Pain and stiffness of the lower back is also noted and leaning forward slightly may make the pain better. In the upper spine the experience is pain and stiffness.

The facet joint block procedure can be both therapeutic and diagnostic. This treatment can be used to identify a pain source and to relieve the pain that is produced by inflammation of the facet joint. If the relief is of short duration, a facet joint rhizotomy procedure may be considered.

How is a facet joint block performed?

Facet joint blocks are performed in the procedure room using fluoroscopy (x-ray). Sedation may or may not be used for this procedure. The patient is positioned on the fluoroscopy table and the facet joints to be treated are identified. The skin is then frozen and a numbing medication (local anesthetic) with or without a steroid is injected into or around the facet joints to be treated.