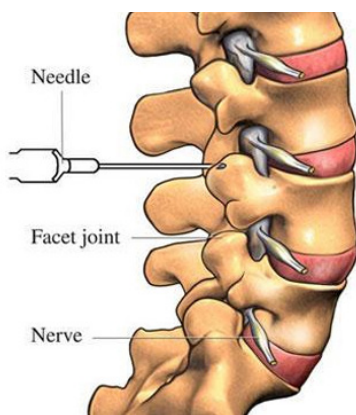


FACET JOINT INJECTION

The vertebral bodies are stacked one on top of another to form the entire structure we call the spine. In between vertebral bodies are tiny joints called facet joints. As arthritic change and inflammation of the joints occur, the nerves to the facet joints can convey severe and diffuse pain. Patients often complain of pain in a generalized poorly defined region of the neck or back. There may be some tenderness overlying the involved joints as well.

Damage to a facet joint is usually caused by a trauma (auto accidents or fall) or due to a degenerated or herniated disc. These all cause the spine to sub-lux (move out of joint) and the joint capsule is irritated. It is usually worsened by sudden movements or prolonged episodes of poor posture, (e.g. kneeling in the garden, bending over to lift or straining to read a book or computer terminal). Many patients find the worst time for pain is at night, when all the muscles relax and the joints grind together.

Placing local anesthetic and steroid medication directly into the facet joint can 'block' facet joint pain. Since



the nerve root can supply two levels of facet, it is recommended that the joint space above and below are injected with medication.

Using a small needle and an X-ray machine (fluoroscopy), medication is placed into the facet joints. In most cases, one side is selected first to help diagnose and therapeutically treat the current back pain complaints. While an injection may last on average of four months, patients can experience many different results.

Complications

As with any injection, infection, bleeding, increased pain, and failure to derive expected results may occur. Complications are minimized by the use of a sterile environment in the operating room and discontinuation of Aspirin, Coumadin, or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

Procedure

Your doctor will place you on your stomach in the operating room and clean your back where the needles will be placed. Local anesthetic is used to prepare the skin and prevent excessive pain. You will feel pressure due to the placement of the needles. A fluoroscopy X-ray machine is used for needle guidance. You doctor will ask if your pain is reproduced when medication is placed into the facet joint. This may be painful, but it does give excellent information to your doctor. Once the medication is placed you will go to a recovery room for observation before going home.

You may experience some pain after the injection. This is normal and is likely due to the irritation of the needle stick. Ice placed over the injection site for 20 minutes 2-3 times for the next two days will help. If you continue to have pain, please contact our office.

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