

# Lumbar Facet Joint Injection

Your spinal column supports your head and body and protects your spine. It includes 26 bony structure units called vertebrae (VER-tuh-bray). Where one vertebrae meets the next, a joint is formed called the facet joint.

You may feel pain if a facet joint in your lower back is inflamed or swollen. The doctor will inject a medicine to help lessen swelling and pain. This medicine is called a steroid (STARE-oyd). Steroids injected into inflamed facet joints can give relief for days, months, or longer. If pain returns, your doctor may inject the drug again or try other treatment.

## Risks

Problems are rare. They may include:

- Infection
- Dizziness
- Backache
- Headache
- Nerve irritation
- Bleeding
- Allergic reaction to the medicines

Common side effects of steroids include:

- Flushing
- Warm feeling
- Headache
- Nervousness
- Trouble sleeping

These will go away in a few days.

## Benefits

May give pain relief and lessen other symptoms.

## **Alternatives**

- Keep taking pain medicine or non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen and others)
- Physical therapy
- Surgery
- Stop doing the activities that cause pain

## **How to prepare**

Tell your doctor about any of the following:

- You take an anticoagulant or a blood thinning medicine.
- You have diabetes. You inject insulin or take oral diabetes medicine.
- You might be pregnant.
- You react to x-ray dyes or latex products.
- You have an infection or you take antibiotics for an infection.
- You have had a vaccination (shot) in the past 2 weeks.

You cannot drive home after your treatment. **Arrange for someone to drive you.**

Take your regular medications and eat as usual unless directed otherwise. Your doctor will tell you if you must stop taking certain drugs before this treatment. You may need to adjust your dose of drugs for diabetes.

## **During treatment**

You will lie on the exam table on your stomach or side. Your skin will be cleaned and covered by a sterile drape. The doctor will numb your skin at the chosen site. You may feel a pin prick and a little burning.

The doctor will use an X-ray machine called a fluoroscope (FLOR-o-scope) to locate the exact place in your spine to inject a steroid. This drug will reduce inflammation.

## **After treatment**

For 3 to 4 hours, you may notice one or more of these effects:

- Your legs or feet may tingle or feel numb. This is temporary.

- Your legs or feet may feel weak. This is temporary.
- You may feel light headed or dizzy.

Your skin and muscle may be numb for several hours where the needle enters your skin. This site may be sore for 1 to 2 days after the numbness wears off. You may also have a bruise at the site.

When the numbing medicine wears off your pain may come back. The steroid starts to work in 3 to 4 days. It may take as long as 2 weeks for you to notice the full effect of pain control from the injection.

### **Home instructions after treatment**

**Do not** drive for 3 to 4 hours.

Take it easy for the rest of the day. Do not play sports, do housework or things that make you move fast or lift more than 10 pounds. (That is what a gallon of milk weighs.) Ask your doctor or nurse what activities are safe.

Your legs may feel numb or weak. You may not notice the weakness until you try to walk. Do not try to walk if your legs are weak. Stay seated and wait for the weakness to go away. It can take up to 1 hour.

**Do not have any vaccines** in the next 2 weeks.

You may shower. Do not use a bathtub, hot tub or whirlpool for 2 days.

**Do not** use heating pads or any other form of heat on the site for 2 days. Heat may make the drug spread beyond the place where you need the most pain relief.

You may put an ice pack on the site for 20 minutes. You can do this 3 or 4 times during the first 24 hours after your treatment.

Take your usual medicine unless your doctor tells you to do something else. If you have diabetes, the injected drug may make your blood sugar rise. Talk to your doctor or diabetes educator about adjusting your diet and medicine.

**Contact information**

Call and ask for a nurse who works with your doctor if you have questions or any of these problems:

- Fever of 101° F or higher.
- Redness, swelling or warm skin where you were treated.
- Drainage, odor or increased pain at the needle entry site
- Headache, stiff neck or upset stomach still bother you the next morning

**Contact information**

**8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays**

Neurosciences

(608) 775-9000 or (800) 362-9567, ext. 59000

**After hours, weekends and holidays**

Telephone Nurse Advisor

(608) 775-4454 or (800) 858-1050

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