

Patient Information: Medial Branch Block Injection

What is a Medial Branch Block?

Medial branches are small nerves that supply the **facet joints** in your spine with pain signals. If your pain is caused by the facet joints then by stopping the pain signals, your pain can be relieved. A medial branch block is an **injection** to the nerves to numb them so they can no longer supply pain signals.

The procedure is for **diagnosis only** and is **not** for permanent pain relief. Following this procedure your consultant will be able to determine whether the facet joints are the cause of pain.

What does it involve?

- You will be lying on your front for the procedure, which usually takes **10-20 minutes**. Local anaesthetic is injected into the skin and fine needles are passed toward the nerves under x-ray guidance. Each joint is supplied by two nerves so often a number of needles are used.
- Once the needle is confirmed to be close to the nerve, the injection takes place.

What is Injected?

- **A small quantity of dye** (which can be seen on the xray images) is used to confirm that the injection is close to the nerve.
- **Local Anaesthetic** – injected onto the nerve.

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Does it Work?

The injection is used primarily to diagnose the source of your pain. The local anaesthetic numbs the joint so if the **facet joint** is the source of pain, you should experience significant pain relief within **15 minutes** of the injection, which may last for a few hours. There is no prolonged relief but IF the facet joint is confirmed as a source of pain then there may be some prolonged pain relief from a potentially longer lasting treatment called **radiofrequency denervation** or **rhizolysis**.

Risks and Side Effects:

Due to the procedure:

- Infection – rare.
- More discomfort for the first few days after your injection.
- Bruising to the injection area.
- Leg numbness and weakness are very rare side effects.
- Allergy to injected medication.

What Happens on the Day of My Appointment?

- **You can eat and drink.**
- Take all your tablets as normal. Bring a list of your tablets with you.
- A nurse will take some details from you to check that you are fit for your procedure.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form. The doctor will be able to answer any questions you may have at this time.
- You will be at the Day Unit or radiology department for about **1 - 2 hours**. This time may vary depending on unforeseen circumstances.
- After you have had your procedure, you will need to stay with us for about **30 minutes** before you can go home.

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You must **NOT** drive home or go home on public transport. Please arrange for someone to collect you from the Day Unit. You are allowed to go home by taxi.

After Your Injection

- Take things easy for the rest of the day. Do not do any excessive exercise or heavy work for the first few days.
- Remove the dressing the next morning.
- Continue to take your pain tablets till you notice any improvement in your symptoms.

Important Information

Please inform the Day Unit if you are **diabetic**, have a **cough** or **cold** or have any kind of **infection**.

You must inform us if you are taking any of the following tablets – **antibiotics, aspirin, warfarin** or **clopidogrel** before attending as some of these may need to be stopped some days before.

Information for females - We will need to know the start date of your last menstrual period due to the use of x-ray equipment. If you think you might be pregnant, contact the Day Unit for advice.

Dr Robin Chakraverty

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