

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone (City Hospital Campus): 0800 052 1195

Freephone (QMC Campus): 0800 183 0204

From a mobile or abroad: 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301



Minicom: 0800 183 0204

E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk

Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

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Facet joint injections

Spinal outpatients

This document can be provided in different languages and formats. For more information please contact:

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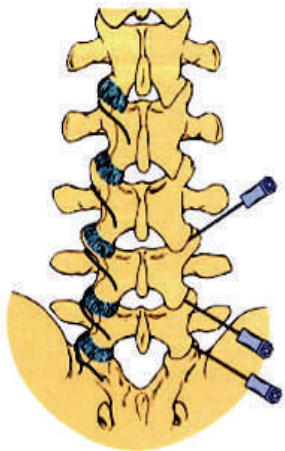
What are facet joints?

Facet joints (or zygo-apophyseal joints) are found in pairs between adjacent vertebrae (the bony building blocks of the spine). They help to stabilise the segments of the spine whilst allowing flexibility. These joints are classed as synovial joints (like the knee or hip joints). This means that each joint is surrounded by a capsule, which produces a fluid that nourishes and lubricates the joint. The joint surfaces are covered with smooth cartilage allowing them to move smoothly against each other.

Like other joints in the body, the facet joints can degenerate over time and this 'wear and tear' can interrupt the normal function of the joint.

Why are facet joint injections given?

It is generally accepted that the lumbar facet joints are a potential source of low back and referred buttock and thigh pain.



If your doctor is considering you for facet joint injections it is likely that they feel that these joints are contributing to your symptoms.

These injections are carried out in order to give you pain relief. The period and extent of pain relief can vary and some people experience no benefit at all. People who have had several sets of injections may report differing amounts of pain relief with the effects lasting for different periods of time following each session.

Prior to your facet joint injection you will be advised to stop taking any blood thinning medication such as warfarin, dipyridamole, clopidogrel or aspirin.

How is the injection given?

This procedure is carried out whilst you are awake. It may be done either in the operating theatre or in the main x-ray department depending on the list you have been placed on.

You will be required to lie on your stomach for the procedure, which may last around 15-20 minutes. Fluoroscopy (a form of x-ray) is used by the surgeon to guide placement of a needle into the joint. As this is done you may experience some discomfort that you may identify as your 'usual' pain. A solution of local anaesthetic and anti-inflammatory steroid is then injected into the joint when satisfactory needle placement is achieved.

Typically, between four and six joints will be injected during the session.

The complication rate for facet joint injections is low. Risks include bleeding (or bruising at the site of injection), infection and nerve root irritation.

What happens afterwards?

You will usually be allowed to go home a short while after the procedure but are advised **not** to drive or travel on public transport. Within reasonable limits, you should be able to return to regular activities by the next day. It can take several days for the full effect of the injection to become apparent and we advise you to continue taking your normal pain killing medication. It is useful if you keep a diary noting the degree of improvement in back pain, the duration of relief and activities that you can and cannot do after the injection.

Following this procedure you will be **discharged** back to the care of your GP.

Should you find this procedure helpful, your GP can refer you back to the clinic or to your local pain team.