

# Facet Joint Injections

## Patient Information

Pain Team

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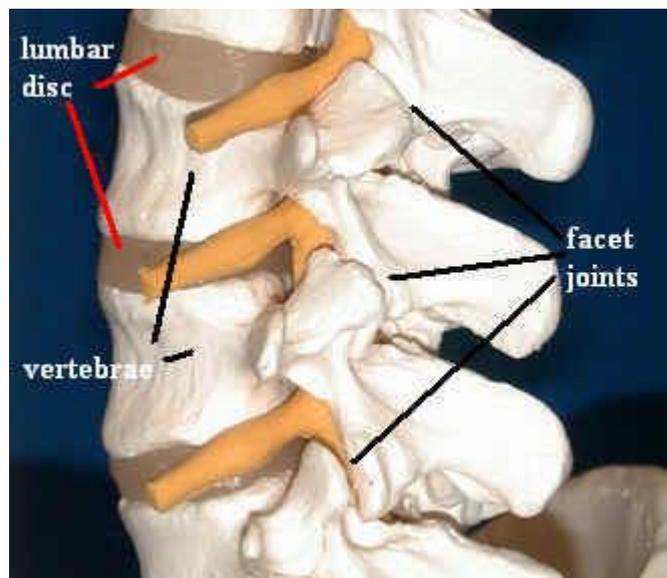
## What is a facet joint injection?

This is the name given to an injection into the small linking joints of the spine, the facet joints. This type of treatment is widely used for the treatment of chronic back pain due to facet joint disease.

A facet joint injection is not a cure for the cause of your pain, but it is used to help reduce the level of your pain.

## Why are you having the injection?

Your X-Ray or scan has shown that some of your facet joints are arthritic. Many people have some degree of arthritis in their facet joints once they get over the age of 30, and why some people should experience pain and others not is still a bit of a mystery. Some patients do benefit from injections of steroids into their facet joints, and the only way of finding out if this is the case for you is by trying it. The picture below explains where the facet joints are in the spine.



## How does it work?

The injection contains a mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid. It is thought to have the following beneficial effects:

- Local anaesthetics numb the nerves for a period of hours giving short-term relief.
- Local steroid has a long-term effect reducing inflammation in the joint and around the nerves.

There are only minimal effects on the rest of the body using local steroids by this route of administration. Any side effects are more likely to occur if steroids are given over a short period of time, for example raised blood pressure and weight gain. Diabetics may experience short-term problems with blood sugar control.

If the facet joint injection is helpful it may be repeated at the discretion of your consultant.

## What does the treatment involve?

A facet joint injection is performed as a day case procedure and it is performed with x-ray control to help identify the small joints accurately.

On the day of treatment please take all your routine medications. If you are taking any medication to thin the blood, such as Warfarin or you have a blood clotting disorder please inform the pain doctor or the chronic pain nurse as soon as possible as your medication may need to be stopped before the injection to prevent bleeding.

You are advised not eat any solid foods 6 hours prior to procedure. Patients can drink and have water until one hour prior to procedure. **If you are diabetic please inform a member of staff on your arrival.**

You will be seen on the ward by one of the pain doctors, who will explain the treatment and answer any questions that you may have, you will then be asked to sign a consent form for the treatment.

Shortly before the injection you will need to change into a hospital gown.

You will need to lie face down on the table throughout the procedure, if you have any difficulty in getting into this position a member of staff will be there to help you. Your back will be cleaned with antiseptic and a local anaesthetic injected into the skin to numb the area, there may be some discomfort at the time of the injection. Several joints may be injected in the same session.

You will have a small dressing on your back to cover the procedure site, this may be removed after 24 hours but do not worry if it should fall off sooner.

Following the injection you may sleep in any position that you find comfortable.

## Benefits

Unfortunately we cannot guarantee you will gain benefit from this drug.

## Alternatives

Your pain specialist will have discussed alternatives with you in your consultation; these could be either medicines; different injections or physical therapies. Every patient is unique and therefore specific alternatives cannot be given on an information leaflet as not all treatments are suitable for everyone.

## What are the side effects?

You may feel as though your back is a little bruised after the injection and also you may experience an increase in the level of your pain for a few days, this is normal but it will quickly resolve and you can continue to take your normal analgesia / medication for pain that you have.

A small percentage of patients may experience an increased level of pain for much longer.

It is important that you have a responsible adult to escort you home and if possible stay with you overnight. You must not drive or use public transport for the journey home. It is recommended that you rest for the remainder of the day. It is possible that your procedure could be cancelled if the above cannot be confirmed. Please let staff know as soon as possible if you have any issues arranging an escort/overnight support.

If the facet joint injection helps to reduce the level of your pain, please remember you will still have a problem with your back. Do not rush about doing strenuous activities, but build up your activity levels slowly.

### **Risk of procedures performed during the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

There may be additional risks to your health as a result of undergoing procedures to help manage your pain during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic which we cannot quantify at the moment.

If you are receiving a steroid injection, we have to make you aware that steroids can suppress your immune system, which in turn could make you more vulnerable to the Corona virus or any other infection. We do not know whether this is a true risk, and if there is a bigger risk of developing Corona virus infection, we do not know how big the risk is.

Often, deciding whether or not to have an injection is about weighing up how badly your pain symptoms are affecting your life and what risk you are willing to accept in order to alleviate the pain (bearing in mind that the procedure may not necessarily work or in the worst case scenario, might make you worse off than you were before the procedure). A pain injection may help your pain temporarily but at the cost of an increased chance of developing Corona virus infection. The other risks of the procedure will remain unchanged from what they were before the start of the pandemic. Although there is no clear evidence in the literature that steroid injections can increase the likelihood of acquiring COVID-19 or increasing the severity, possible concerns have been raised regarding reduced survival benefit and possible harms. We know that complications and mortality related to COVID-19 are higher in some groups of people, particularly older people and those with comorbidities / health problems.

We will not administer steroids if a person has COVID-19 infection, or if there is a possibility that he/she may have COVID-19, even if there are no symptoms at the time.

It has been suggested that a water soluble steroid may possibly be safer (e.g. Dexamethasone 3.3-13.2 mg) to avoid longer lasting systemic side effects, including suppression of the immune system. After the injections patients should self-isolate for

seven days. If there are any concerns following an injection, patients can either contact the pain service on the provided telephone number (Monday-Friday 8am to 4pm) or you may have to attend the emergency department for further assessment.

Please also be aware that as this is a crisis situation, guidance and information can change very quickly and what we did a week ago may not necessarily be what we are doing today. Besides your normal procedure consent form, during the time of the pandemic we will ask you to complete an additional COVID-19 specific Patient Information and Consent Form. We would ask that you complete and return as directed.

### **Will the steroid injection affect how well my COVID vaccine will work?**

Currently there is no evidence to suggest that a steroid injection to a joint or soft tissue will reduce the effectiveness of a COVID vaccine. For a non-essential steroid injection, it should be delayed for 4 weeks after the vaccination and not be given within the 4 weeks before a vaccination. i.e. the steroid injection should not be given 4 weeks before or after the vaccination.

Where a patient has booked their injection appointment with the booking team and they subsequently are notified of their vaccination date, which falls within the 4 weeks either side of their steroid injection, they are advised to contact the booking team to rearrange their pain injection. Or contact their vaccine provider to discuss rearranging their vaccination appointment. Should patients not follow this advice they risk being cancelled on the day.

### **Contact information**

If you have any questions please contact the Pain Management Team on Telephone: 01942 773099.

It is very important that you attend any appointments made for you with either, the Doctor; Nurse; Physiotherapist; Occupational therapist or the Psychologist. If you cannot attend please cancel the appointment and re-arrange, failure to cancel will result in discharge from the pain service and you will need to be re-referred by your GP if you wish to be seen again.

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager  
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary  
Wigan Lane  
Wigan WN1 2NN

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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: <https://www.wwl.nhs.uk>

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This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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