

Medial Branch Block

Your Back

Your back is made up of a spinal column, discs, spinal cord, spinal nerves, ligaments and muscles.

The flexible vertebrae start at the base of your skull and end at your hips (pelvis). These spine bones are linked together and protect the spinal cord and nerves, which run through the center of your spinal column.

The back of your spine has facet joints. Medial branch nerves carry pain signals from the hurting joints to your brain.

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Your health care provider wants you to have an injection to help reduce your pain.

If nerves are numbed, they won't be able to carry the pain sensations to your brain. The injection should give you short-term relief from pain and stiffness if the pain is caused by facet joint arthritis.

During an injection, the health care provider will use X-ray to find the proper place for the needle. Once the location has been found, he or she will inject an anesthetic medicine (such as lidocaine or bupivacaine) into your spinal or cervical (neck) facet nerves.

The injection takes a few minutes. The more nerves that need to be blocked, the more time it will take.

Number of Injections You Need

You will likely need a second injection 1 to 2 weeks after the first one. This can confirm that your pain is coming from the facet joints.

Injection Risks

Injection risks include:

- infection and bleeding at the injection site
- pain that gets worse.

Nerve damage, spinal cord injuries or serious side effects are rare.

What to Tell Your Health Care Provider

Tell your health care provider if you:

- have an allergy to any of the medicine being used for the injection
- take blood thinners such as warfarin (Jantoven[®]) or clopidogrel bisulfate (Plavix[®])
- have a skin infection or injury near the injection site.

Before the Injection

- For your safety, have a responsible adult drive you home.
- You may eat and drink as usual, unless you receive other directions.
- Take your regular medicines (including blood thinners), unless you receive other directions.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.

During the Injection

- You will lie on your stomach if you are having an injection for low back pain. You will lie on your side or stomach if you are having an injection for neck pain.
- You will be awake during the injection.
- The health care provider will use X-ray to locate and mark the injection site.
- After applying a numbing medicine to your skin, he or she will insert a needle in the exact spot you need pain relief.
- You may feel some discomfort.
- Tell the health care provider if you feel pain in your neck, back, or down your arm or leg.

After the Injection

- Your pain may be gone or you may feel much better right away.
- Have someone give you a ride home. Take it easy for the rest of the day.
- You may put ice at the injection site.
 - Wrap an ice pack or bag of frozen vegetables in a clean dish towel.
 - Put the pack on your injection site for 20 minutes. Take it off for 20 minutes.
- You may do your regular activities.
- You may return to work tomorrow, unless you receive other directions.
- After 24 hours you may:
 - remove the bandage from the injection site
 - take a shower.

Fill in Your Pain Diary

- Keep track of your pain in your pain diary.
- After the injection, rating your pain from zero to 10 will help you know if the facet joints are causing your pain.

Follow-up

- Keep your follow-up appointments, even if you are feeling better.
- If the block helps, you and your health care provider will talk about a procedure that can give you long-term pain relief (known as radiofrequency ablation).