

Diagnostic Cervical Facet Joint Medial Branch Block

Facet joints are pairs of joints that allow movement of the spine. Up to 6 out of 10 people with neck pain and / or headaches may have pain arising from the facet joints. After whiplash up to 1 in 2 people may have pain from the upper facet joints. The nerves that carry information from the facet joints are called the 'medial branch of the dorsal rami'. A test injection called a 'diagnostic medial branch block' may be appropriate for some people to see how much these joints may be contributing to neck pain. People who experience significant but short term relief may be offered a procedure called a 'radiofrequency denervation' in an attempt to achieve longer term pain relief.

Benefits

Pain relief: If significant temporary pain relief is achieved after 30 minutes of your diagnostic injection a radiofrequency denervation may be considered

Risks

Very Common: More than 1 person in 10 are affected

No benefit: Injection treatments are not always effective and you may not be offered a radiofrequency denervation.

Common: between 1 in 10 and 1 in 100 people are affected

Tenderness and / or bruising: Mild local tenderness and / or bruising may occur at the site of injection and usually settles over the first few days

Uncommon: Between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 are affected

Numbness and/or weakness: The local anaesthetic may rarely spread around the nerve root causing some numbness and/or weakness in your arms and other areas. Should this occur, the effect is temporary and will rapidly resolve over minutes or rarely hours

Rare: Between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000 people are affected

Infection: This is rare. You should seek medical help if there is local warmth or redness over the site of injection with tenderness and/or you feel hot and unwell. This may require antibiotic treatment.

Allergy: Injected local anaesthetic may rarely cause an allergic reaction

Very Rare: Fewer than 1 in 10,000 people are affected

Nerve injury: There are important nerves in the spine, but serious nerve injury is very rare. Injury to nerves that supply muscles to your leg can lead to foot drop for lumbar injections causing you to be unable to lift your foot up. Great care is taken during the procedure to avoid this very rare complication by placing the needles carefully under x-ray guidance. The nerve is only treated when the doctor is confident that they are in the right position

Unknown: Serious events have been reported anecdotally but it is not possible to comment on their true incidents

Stroke: This can affect the brain and spinal cord if inadvertently a blood vessel is injected. This could result in paraplegia or death.

References

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