

Facet and Sacroiliac Joint Injections

A facet or sacroiliac joint injection is a therapeutic procedure to relieve or eliminate pain.

Facet joints are located on the back of the spine on each side where one vertebra slightly overlaps the adjacent vertebra; they guide and restrict movement of the spine. The sacroiliac joint (SI joint) connects the spine and pelvis.

Risks and Benefits

Degenerative arthritis of the lumbar facet joints and the sacroiliac joints are some of the many causes of back pain. A long-acting steroid can calm the inflammation and decrease back pain for several months at a time. Of course, this won't take away the arthritis or other causes of the irritation, but this gives your body time and space to heal.

The complication rate for these joint injections is very low, but not zero. As with any procedure involving a needle, there is a rare chance of infection or bleeding at the injection site. Reaction to the contrast material used during the procedure is also rare (such as itching, sneezing or rash). There is also a chance that you will not experience any pain relief, or may need additional injections.

How You Should Prepare

Arrange to bring someone with to drive you home; You should not drive for 2 hours after the procedure. Have someone stay with you.

If you are on blood thinners, you will need to hold the medication prior to the procedure. Contact your healthcare provider before stopping any medication to determine if it is safe for you.

If you have an infection or if you are on antibiotics, the medication course must be complete prior to the procedure, to ensure that no infection remains.

On the day of the procedure, wear comfortable clothes without metal fasteners, including zippers, buttons, and snaps.

What Happens During the Procedure

Joint injections at North Star Radiology are image guided to ensure exact placement of the needle during the procedure.

You will lie on an x-ray table on your stomach, and an x-ray camera will be positioned above you. The area will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution, and a local anesthetic will be used in the skin to numb the area.

A thin needle will be then be guided into the appropriate joint. The location of the needle will be confirmed by injecting a small amount of x-ray contrast. Some patients may feel a pressure sensation or discomfort while the contrast is being injected. Next a combination of anesthetic (immediate relief) and steroid (long-term relief) will be injected.

The procedure itself will take about 20 minutes once it begins.

After the Procedure

You should have someone stay with you for 2 hours after the procedure. Rest for the remainder of the day, and do not return to work until the next day. You may resume your normal diet and prescribed medications (resume blood thinner medication tomorrow). Avoid heavy lifting or strenuous activity for 24 hours after the procedure. Wait until the day following your procedure before showering.

You may feel soreness or tenderness at the needle insertion site or a temporary increase in pain as the anesthetic wears off and the steroid starts to take effect. You can use an ice pack to relieve discomfort, once every two hours for 20 minutes at a time. Do not apply any heat to the injection site for 72 hours following your procedure.

In some patients, a single injection will give permanent relief. In other patients, a series of injections may be beneficial.

