AUSLON MEDICAL GROUP

Information for adult patients undergoing

Facet Joint Medial Branch Blocks for the Treatment of Pain

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information about medial branch blocks and to answer some questions that you may have.

What is a medial branch block?

A medial branch block is an injection of local anaesthetic over the tiny nerve to the facet joint. The injection provides information about whether pain is coming from your facet joints in the spine.

Usually, several injections are given during the same procedure. It is used for localised spinal pain where simpler measures have not helped. It can help your pain by reducing some of the pain signals from the joint. Though pain relief is usually short-lived, some people can get significant and more long- lasting pain relief from these injections.

Facet joints are small joints that link the bones of the spine together. The facet joints allow movement and stabilise the spine. Wear and tear, inflammation and injury to the facet joints may cause pain in some people. Several injections to the tiny nerves that supply the different facet joints may be needed depending on the site of pain. The injection contains local anaesthetic. The injection is usually given alongside other treatments such as physiotherapy.

Is this the right treatment for me?

Other treatment options will be discussed with you before deciding to have the injections and your consent is needed. The decision on whether or not to have the injection(s) is made together by you and your doctor. Your doctor will be able to provide you with up-to-date information about the chance of the treatment working for you and how it fits in with other care. If you are undecided about whether or not to have injections then more advice and information can be given. Please speak to your doctor for more information.

If your health has changed, it is important to let your doctor know.

- If you have an infection in your body or on the skin of your back, your doctor may wait until the infection is cleared before you have the treatment.
- If you have been started on anticoagulant or antiplatelet medicines that "thin the blood" such as warfarin, heparin, apixaban, rivaroxaban or clopidogrel, extra preparation may be needed before the treatment.
- If you have any allergies.

You must also tell the doctor if there is any chance that you could be pregnant.

Finally, if you are planning to travel abroad or fly within 5 to 7 days after the injections, please let your doctor know as it may be best to change the date of the injections.

What will happen to me during the treatment?

Before the injection, your doctor will discuss the procedure with you. Your doctor will either ask for your consent before the injection or ask you to confirm that you have already given consent and are still happy to have the injection. The treatment will take place in a dedicated area with a trained person. An X-ray machine, Ultrasound (or other forms of image guidance) will be used to make sure the injection is accurate. Not all doctors give these injections in exactly the same way but this is what usually happens;

- A medical professional will get you ready for the procedure. Your blood pressure and pulse rate may be checked
- A small needle (cannula) may be placed in the back of your hand.
- You will be carefully positioned and the skin around the injection site(s) will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution or spray; this can feel very cold.
- X-ray, Ultrasound or an alternative way will be used to make sure the needle is in the right position.
- You will feel a stinging sensation as local anaesthetic is injected to numb the skin and surrounding tissues. Your doctor will warn you of this first.
- The doctor will direct the injections to the area(s) suspected to be a source of pain. When the injections are made, you may feel pressure, tightness or a pushing sensation. If it is uncomfortable, do let the doctor know.

What will happen to me after my injections?

After the injections you will be taken to a recovery or ward area where nursing staff will check on you. Sometimes you will be asked to lie flat for about 30 minutes or longer. You may be helped to sit up and your blood pressure and pulse may be checked. You will be told when to get dressed and be given help to make sure that you can stand safely after the procedure.

Your pain will be checked at rest and during activities of daily living such as walking and moving your back or neck to find out how much pain you feel compared to the pain you had before the injection (e.g. my pain is 50% better after the injection compared to the pain I had before the injection). This will help assess how much of your pain is coming from the facet joints that were blocked and also help plan future treatments. You will be given more advice when you are ready to go home.

When will I be able to go home from hospital after my injections?

You will usually be able to go home within 30 minutes to a few hours after the injection, depending on how long your doctor or nurse want you to stay. Please make sure that you have someone to collect you after the procedure.

What can I do after my procedure?

Ideally, you should arrange for someone to stay with you for 24 hours but, if you can't, you should at least have access to a telephone. You should not drive, operate machinery, sign legal documents, provide childcare without help or drink alcohol until fit to do so.

If you are not sure, please ask your doctor for more advice.

When can I return to work after the procedure?

This will be different for different people and may depend on the type of work you do. It is difficult to give general advice and so you should discuss this with your doctor.

Will I experience any side-effects?

As with any procedure, there may be side effects. However, these are usually minor and there is little risk of serious harm.

Side-effects may include:

- Mild local tenderness and/or bruising at the site of the injection, that usually gets better over the first few days.
- The local anaesthetic may spread causing some numbness and/or weakness in your legs (low back injections) or arms (in neck procedures). If this happens, the effect is temporary and will quickly get better over minutes or hours.
- Infection. This is rare. You should seek medical help if there is local warmth or redness where you had the injection with tenderness. Or if you feel hot and unwell. This may need antibiotic treatment.

- There are important nerves in the spine, but serious nerve injury is very rare.
- Injection treatments do not always work and may not help your pain.
- In injections in thoracic area only - Injury or collapse of the lung (pneumothorax). This is very rare. If you get chest pain or breathlessness, you should seek immediate medical help.

People vary in how they interpret words and numbers.
This scale is provided to help.

What can I expect in the days afterwards?

You may feel some soreness or aching at the injection site. Please keep the area of the injections dry for 24 hours following the procedure. Do not worry if your pain feels worse for a few days as this sometimes happens. Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal and this should get better. Try to keep on the move about the house while avoiding anything too difficult.

What should I do in the weeks after the injections?

If your pain decreases, you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming on your back will help to improve your muscle tone and strengthen your back. It is best to increase your activities slowly. Try not to do too much as you may have more pain the next day.

What follow-up will be arranged?

A letter will usually be sent to your GP and your doctor will tell you what to do after the procedure. You may be asked to make a call to the pain clinic, be given a form to fill in, or given a telephone review or other appointment.

Is there anything else I need to think about before the procedure?

- Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading.
- Bring any other devices you may need, such as hearing aids, mobility aids etc.
- Always bring a list of all current medication.
- Continue to take your medication as usual on the treatment day.
- Avoid vaccinations including COVID-19 jabs for 2 weeks on either side of the procedure

Finally...

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's or health care team's advice. If you need more information or have any questions or concerns please speak to your GP or contact your Pain Clinic.

Statement of Acknowledgement

- I, ..., confirm that I have read the information on Facet Joint Medial Brach Blocks provided in this form.

- Email address: .....

..... *E-Signature*

...../...../..... *Date*