



Medial Branch & Other Nerve Blocks

WHY HAVE THIS PROCEDURE?

This procedure may be offered to allow your pain specialist to diagnose the cause of your pain and to understand your pain. It may also be performed to give you some temporary relief from your pain. Medial branch blocks are a *diagnostic procedure*, done to assess your suitability for radiofrequency neurotomy (which can provide longer lasting pain reduction – 3 months to 2 years). The relief from medial branch blocks is short lived, from 48-72 hours.

The facet joints are small joints in your spine, one of which is found on each side of your spine and at every vertebra of the spine from neck to tail bone (32 in total). Like all joints these are susceptible to 'wear and tear' such as arthritis, injury or inflammation and, therefore, can be a cause of pain. The 'medial branch' is the nerve that carries *pain signals* from the facet joint to the brain. If you block the *medial branch* nerve, this can sometimes treat pain.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

The procedure will be explained and discussed in detail including the benefits and risks. You will be asked to sign a consent form.

It is vital for us to be aware of any medications you take, any medical problems/conditions you have and any allergies.

Tell us if you take any blood thinning medication like warfarin, Plavix (clopidogrel). Aspirin is generally OK to take before your procedure but best to check with us.

You must not eat or drink anything from the midnight before your procedure. This includes chewing gum.

On the morning of the procedure, take all your regular pain medications (with a sip of water). Don't change the doses or stop them before or after the procedure.

THE PROCEDURE

Procedures are generally performed under 'light sedation', provided by an anaesthetist. They work closely with your pain specialists.

It is sometimes important to communicate with you throughout the procedure. *This is for your own safety.*

The skin is numbed (anaesthetised) with local anaesthetic, which might sting a bit. Your pain specialist will do everything possible to keep any discomfort to a minimum.

We use X-rays for most procedures. *If you are pregnant or could be pregnant, let us know.*

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE PROCEDURE

You will be monitored in the recovery area & ward until it is safe for you to go home.

You may feel a bit drowsy if you had sedation.

Do not drive or operate dangerous machinery, look after children or drink any alcohol for 24 hours. This is for your own safety and those around you. Someone should take you home and take care of you overnight.

Our pain nurse will phone you a few days/weeks after the procedure.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

All injections carry minor risks like discomfort, bleeding, bruising & skin infection.

Procedures can carry major risks that may include worsening of your pain, numbness, serious bleeding or infections.

There can be some very serious but rare side effects like temporary or permanent nerve damage, paralysis, toxic reactions or even life threatening allergic reactions.

If you have any questions or concerns please discuss with your pain specialist & nurse before proceeding.

All procedures carry the risk of not helping to reduce your pain or can sometimes even worsen it.

Sometimes we use steroids (cortisone) in injections. Side effects of steroids might include worsening of your blood levels if you are diabetic & poor sleep.

REMEMBER

After some procedures your pain may worsen for a short time.

Don't change any of your medications before or after the procedure, otherwise it is difficult to assess if the procedure worked.

Fill out your *Block Assessment Form* and get that back to us by email or fax.

If you experience these symptoms after a pain procedure, seek medical attention immediately (GP or ED):

- Feeling unwell in any way, like fevers or a high temperature.
- New or worsening back pain.
- Any numbness or pins and needles that you did not have before the procedure.
- Weakness in the legs or arms.
- Difficulty in passing urine.
- Any incontinence of urine or your bowels.