



**Mid and
South Essex**
University Hospitals Group

Patient Information Service

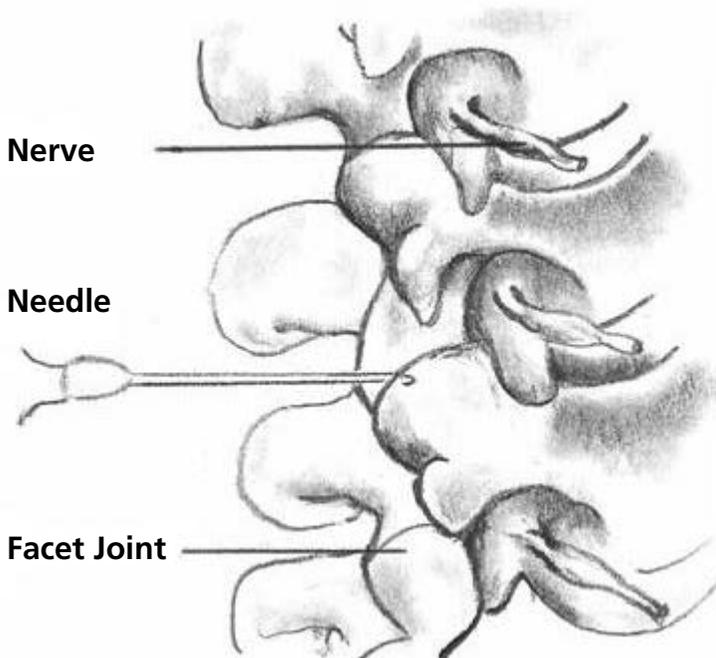
Surgical directorate
Day surgery unit

Facet joint injection advice or medial branch block

Facet joints

(Also known as Zygoapophyseal joints)

Facet joints are the joints between the bones in your spine (backbone). These joints can become inflamed due to wear and tear, causing pain and discomfort in the spinal area and perhaps referred pain in the arms or legs.



Facet joint injection/medial branch block

The aim of a facet joint injection is to get a small amount of steroid and local anaesthetic in and around the joint or onto the nerve coming from the joint, using a fine needle; this produces an anti-inflammatory effect, therefore reducing pain and discomfort.

Prior to the procedure the doctor will insert a small needle into one of the veins in your hand, enabling him/her to give you sedation, which will make you feel sleepy and relaxed.

The procedure is performed under X-ray control, which will help the doctor to identify the joint(s). Local anaesthetic is then injected into the area of the back where the joints have been located. Once the area is numb the facet joint(s) will be injected. It is not uncommon to feel pressure but should not be uncomfortable.

Alternatives to procedure

If your doctor has suggested facet joint injections you may have already tried alternative treatment. These may include physiotherapy, anti-inflammatory painkillers, and alternative therapies.

Benefits of the procedure

Pain relieving benefits will vary with each individual.

Results may be as follows

- The injection eliminates pain for a long period of time and it may not return
- The injection reduces pain for several weeks or months; the pain may then return but be less severe
- The injection reduces the pain for several weeks or months, the pain returns and is the same as before the procedure
- There are diagnostic benefits, ie if injections into the facet joints are helpful but not prolonged there is the possibility of further treatment to the nerves coming from the joints.

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- The pain is not relieved, which unfortunately happens on some occasions.

Medication

Continue your normal medication unless you are advised otherwise. Please let your surgeon know if you are taking Warfarin, Aspirin, Clopidogrel or any of the newer blood thinning tablets. Follow your surgeon's advice about stopping this medication before your procedure and when you should resume taking it.

After the procedure

After your facet joint(s) have been injected you will return to the ward. You may eat and drink as you wish and will be encouraged to be mobile as soon as possible.

Once the local anaesthetic has worn off you are likely to feel sore and stiff for a few days. It can take up to two to three weeks for the steroid injection to take effect and for you to notice any improvement. It may be necessary for you to continue taking pain relief during this time.

You may experience pins and needles in the area which has been injected; this is not uncommon and should subside within a few days.

On arriving home you should commence some simple stretching exercises. Please refer to the back of this booklet and follow the exercises which are specific for the area you have had injected.

Work

You can return to work and normal daily activities as soon as you feel comfortable. If you require a medical certificate please ask your named nurse when you are admitted.

Driving

You are advised not to drive for at least 24 hours after your procedure and do not resume driving until you feel comfortable and safe to do so. Please check with your insurance company for specific advice.

Risks and complications

- Temporary numbness in the legs/arms – only occurs if the local anaesthetic spreads to the spinal nerve roots
- Local soreness and bruising (injection site) – usually settles within a few days
- Procedure not effective – this can be caused by incorrect placement of the needle, or the back pain has some other cause
- Increased pain – the commonest reason for this is increased muscle spasm in the area of the injection, in most cases improves spontaneously
- Infection – introduction of an infection can cause a facet joint or para spinal abscess, if you develop a fever, increased pain, redness or swelling at the injection site following the procedure, please make an urgent appointment to see your GP

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- Severe allergic reaction to the drugs used for the injection – please inform your doctor before the treatment of any drug allergies.

If you have any specific concerns regarding complications please discuss them with your doctor.

Follow-up in the pain clinic

Your first follow-up after the procedure will be carried out by the pain clinic physiotherapists, as a telephone appointment, approximately three to six weeks after the procedure. The appointment letter for this will be sent through the post. If you have any queries before this please contact the pain clinic on **01702 435555 ext 6594**.

If you have any further questions or concerns please telephone the day surgery unit on 01702 385053 (direct line) or 01702 435555 ext 6158 or your own GP.

Exercises

Please attempt these exercises at least once a day.

Do not be tempted by the picture to stretch too far.

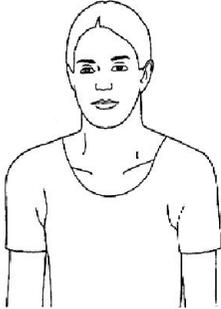
Only move within a comfortable range.

It is usual to feel muscle soreness after exercise especially if the exercises are new.

Try not to stop the exercises completely, but try less repetitions and do not stretch too far.

Any questions ring the general enquiries number on your letter.

Neck exercises



As a warm up exercise, sit or stand. Roll your shoulders in both directions.

Repeat up to five times in each direction.

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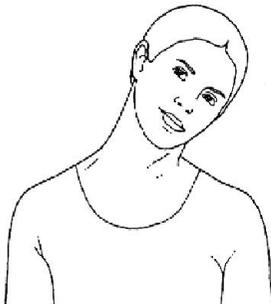


Sitting.

Bend your head forward until you feel a stretch behind your neck. Hold approximately up to five seconds.

Repeat up to five times

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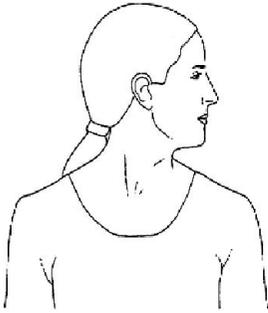


Sitting.

Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Hold up to five seconds. Repeat to the other side.

Repeat up to five times

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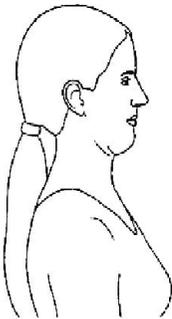


Sitting.

Turn your head to one side until you feel the stretch. Hold for up to five seconds. Repeat to the other side.

Repeat up to five times

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Sitting straight-backed (preferably against a wall).

Pull your chin in, keeping your neck and back straight (not tipping your head forwards or back). Hold at the end position and feel the stretch in the back of your neck.

Repeat up to five times

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Mid back exercises

Sit with the back straight and feet firmly on the floor.

Bring your chin down to your chest and round the upper trunk keeping head and shoulders relaxed. Keep your bottom firmly on the seat.

Repeat up to five times



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Sit or stand. Place your fingers on your shoulders.

Roll your shoulders back.

Repeat up to five times.

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Sit on a chair and cross your arms over your chest clasp the opposite shoulder.

Twist to one side slowly. Let your eyes follow the movement. Breathe out during the exercise.

Repeat up to five times.

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Lower back exercises

Lying on the bed or the floor with your knees bent and feet flat.

Lift one knee towards your chest. Place your hands behind the knee and draw it into your chest. Hold up to five secs.

Repeat up to five times

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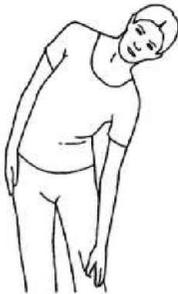


Lying on your back with knees together and bent.

Slowly roll your knees from side to side keeping your upper trunk still.

Repeat up to five times

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Standing.

Slowly bend sideways at the waist.

Repeat up to five times

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Standing with hands clasped in front of you.

Lift both arms forward over your head and lengthen your spine reaching to the ceiling; you can also lengthen your spine without raising your arms.

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Repeat up to 5 times



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If this leaflet does not answer all of your questions, or if you have any other concerns please contact the day surgery unit on: **01702 385053**.

www.southend.nhs.uk

For a translated, large print or audio tape version of this document please contact:

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Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Prittlewell Chase
Westcliff-on-Sea
Essex, SS0 0RY

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