

CERVICAL MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCK

for chronic neck pain and headache

What is a cervical medial branch block ?

A cervical medial branch block is an outpatient procedure for diagnosing and treating neck, shoulder, upper back and headache pain.

What are cervical facet joints?

Facet joints connect the vertebrae, the bones of the spine which help guide your spine when you move. The neck area of the spine is the cervical region which contains seven vertebrae.

Facet joints are the size of a thumbnail and are found on both sides of the spine. Cervical facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. Medial branch nerves are found near facet joints and transmit pain signals from the facet joints to your brain.

What is cervical facet joint pain?

You may feel pain if a cervical facet joint is injured which may feel like muscle tension or severe pain.

The cartilage inside the joint may be injured or only connecting ligaments surrounding the joint are injured.

Facet pain also depends on which facet joint is affected. Cervical facet pain can occur in an area from your head down to your lower shoulder blade.

How do I know if I have cervical facet pain?

If you have pain in one or more of these areas when you turn your head or neck, and it lasts longer than two months, you may have cervical facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRI's may not always show if a facet joint is causing pain.

What is a cervical facet injection?

In a cervical medial branch block, a local anesthetic is injected near the medial branch nerve which stops the transmission of pain signals from the facet joint.

If this reduces the pain and helps you to move your neck normal, this may tell the doctor which facet joint is causing the pain.

What happens during injection?

A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle near the medial branch nerve. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, must be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. A dye may also be injected to make sure the needle is at the correct spot.

When the doctor is sure the needle is at the correct place, the medicine will be injected.



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What happens after an injection?

You will be monitored for up to 30 minutes after an injection. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions. You will also be given a pain diary. It is important to fill this out because it helps your doctor know how the injection is working.

It may help to move your neck in ways that hurt before the injection to see if the pain is still there but do not overdo it. Take it easy for the rest of the day.

You may feel immediate pain relief and numbness in your neck for a period of time after the injection. This may indicate the medication has reached the right spot.

Your pain may return after this short pain-free period, or may even be a little worse for a day or two. It may be caused by needle irritation or by the corticosteroid itself. Corticosteroids usually take two or three days to start working, but can take as long as a week.

You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

How long can I expect pain relief?

The extent and duration of pain relief may depend on the amount of inflammation and how many areas are involved. Other coexisting factors may be responsible for your pain. If the pain disappears for a short time and returns, you may be a candidate for radiofrequency ablation of the medial branch nerve. This procedure provides a more sustained disruption of pain signals and often prolonged pain relief.

This information is for general education only. Specific questions or concerns should always be discussed with your doctor.



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