

## **Medial Branch Blocks**

### What is a medial branch block and what are facet joints?

Medial branch nerves are very small nerve branches that carry pain messages from facet joints to the brain where they are experienced. The facet joints are small joints in the back of the spine that form connections between each vertebra. If these nerves are blocked or numbed, they will not be able to transfer the painful sensation from the joints to the brain. Therefore, this procedure is completed to see if your back pain is caused by the facet joints.

### How is the procedure performed?

The injection will be given with you lying on your stomach. Your skin is cleansed with antiseptic solution and a numbing medicine is injected to numb the area. A small needle is then guided using an x-ray to the targeted medial branch nerve which is then numbed. The injection takes about 10 minutes or less to complete.

### Will the injection hurt?

There is some discomfort with needle insertion which we minimize by numbing the skin over the nerves with a numbing medicine. If you have a history of anxiety related to medical procedures- or nausea, excessive sweating, fainting, or dizziness/lightheadedness with medical procedures; oral valium is recommended and can be prescribed for you to take prior to the injection. This will eliminate these reactions (called vaso-vagal reactions). If this is needed, please mention it to our staff so that we can get you the prescription in a timely manner.

### How long does the effect last?

The effect will last several hours or more. This is strictly a diagnostic block to test how much of your pain is due to the facet joints, and to determine whether a radiofrequency ablation procedure would likely provide long term pain relief for you. Once the numbing medicine wears off, the pain will likely return, and you may have some increased soreness for a day or two.

### What is the next step after the injection?

If you have the expected short-term relief from the numbing medicine, radiofrequency ablation treatment of the medial branch nerves will provide pain relief for a longer period of time (average one to one and a half years).

### What are the risks and side effects?

Serious side effects/complications are very rare. The most common problem (although still rare), after the injection is pain in the area of the injection for a few days. Infection, bleeding, and nerve injury are avoided by using sterile technique, and x-ray guidance. The risk for bleeding is so low that you do not need to stop your blood thinner medication.