

Treatment Specific Information

FACET RHIZOTOMY

Facet joints are in the back of the spine. They add stability and allow controlled movement of the spine. Like knees and hips, these joints suffer from arthritic changes and can cause back and neck pain.

Facet joint injections are the first treatment for facet pain. The injections are brief and simple outpatient procedures and are aimed to relieve inflammation of the joints. A type of cortico-steroid (anti-inflammatory like cortisone) is used for the injection, along with a long lasting type of local anesthetic.

Sometimes, patients experience relief with facet injections, but of short duration. In these cases, a longer lasting procedure is available called *Facet Rhizotomy*.

Pain from facet joints is transmitted to the spinal cord and brain through a single nerve called the *medial branch*. This tiny nerve serves no other function and is in a very predictable location in the spine. Therefore, this nerve can be eliminated with no loss of function. Pain from the facet joint would then have no conduit to the spinal cord and brain and patients no longer feel pain from the joint.

The procedure itself is brief, outpatient, and usually requires no sedation. Local anesthesia is used while the facet joints are visualized with a fluoroscope (x-ray). A small, needle-like probe is then placed in the area of the facet joint nerve (*medial branch*). The probe then heats the nerve with a high-frequency signal for a couple of minutes until the nerve no longer functions.

After the procedure, you may have soreness at the site of the injection and experience mild worsening of your usual pain. This injection is not within the spinal canal, so post-injection headache is rare. You should rest the day of the injection, but no specific restrictions are necessary.

If you have fever, chills, new numbness or weakness, substantial worsening of your pain, or other troubling symptoms, please call our office at any time at 707-252-9660.