New York
Spine & Wellness Center

Facet Block or Medial Branch Block

What is it?	The facet joints (true joints of the spine) are located at the side of the spine. These joints are filled with synovial (lubricating) fluid. Each joint is associated with small nerves. A facet block, or medial branch block, is an injection made into a facet joint. A fluoroscope (specialized x-ray) is used to confirm that the facet joint is the source of the patient's pain. The procedure is done to decrease inflammation and pain in the affected area.
Why is it done?	Facet blocks are performed when a patient has evidence of changes resulting from arthritis in the back or neck, or from derangement (defect) in the facet joints. Other back and neck pain problems involve pain that originates in the facet joints, including whiplash, and spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal). Your physician may prescribe one or more facet blocks, both to determine the location of your pain generator and attempt to diminish the inflammation in the affected area.
How is it done?	If the procedure is performed in the neck an intravenous (IV) catheter (tube) will be placed in your vein. When you are in the procedure room you will be asked to lie either face down (for upper or low back) or on your back (if the area is in the neck) on a cushioned x-ray table. A small needle is used to inject a local anesthetic (numbing medication) to numb the skin. Then small needles are placed in the side of the back or neck with the aid of a fluoroscope (x-ray machine). Usually, three or four needles are placed, since many nerves may be associated with a particular joint. The nerve associated with each joint is targeted, and a solution of local anesthetic and a cortisone derivative (anti-inflammatory medication) is injected. The needles are removed and small band aids are applied.
Is there any preparation?	You may receive conscious sedation. Conscious sedation is medication given through an IV (tube) in your arm. The medication will help you relax, but it will not put you to sleep. If you opt to have conscious sedation, you **MUST NOT EAT OR DRINK** for **4** hours before your procedure. You may, however, take your medication with a **small sip of water.**
What to wear?	Please wear loose, comfortable clothing. Please leave all jewelry and other valuables at home.
How long does it take?	We ask that you arrive 30-45 minutes before the scheduled time of your procedure. The procedure lasts about 15 to 30 minutes, and you will be in the recovery area about 15 minutes.
Risks	The risks of this procedure include, but are not limited to: * Pain in the area where the needle(s) were inserted. The pain can last for two to three days, and can be treated by using ice and mild analgesics (pain medication) such as Motrin, Naprosyn or Tylenol. * An allergic reaction to the local anesthetic or dye. Most allergic reactions do not require further treatment. * Temporary numbness or weakness in your arms or legs, depending on the location of the injection: This is normal. You should have assistance with walking and should not drive for 24 hours after the procedure * Bleeding in the area of the injection * Infection in the area of the injection * Increased pain * Nerve damage, stroke, paralysis and even death.