

THORACIC FACET INJECTION

For Back Pain

A thoracic facet joint injection is an outpatient procedure for diagnosing and treating back pain.

What are thoracic facet joints?

Thoracic facet joints are small joints located in pairs along the spine in your back. These joints provide stability and guide motion in your spine.

What is thoracic facet joint pain?

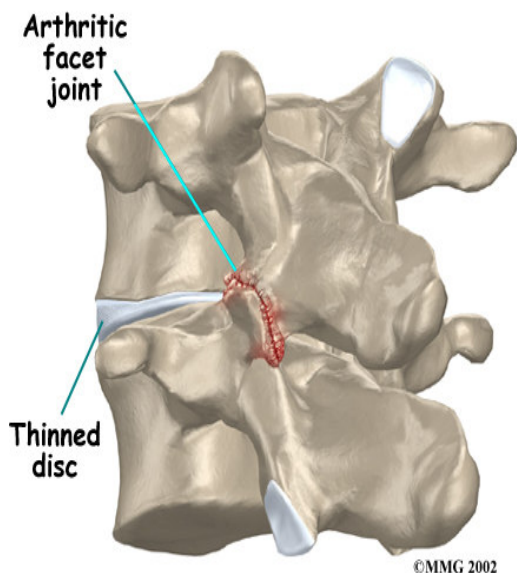
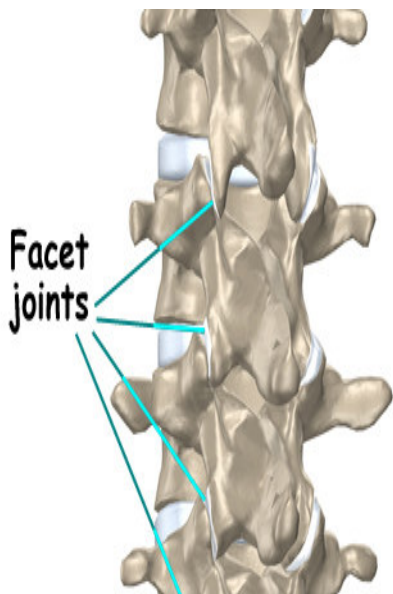
You may feel pain if a thoracic facet joint is injured. Sometimes it feels like muscle tension. Other times it can be severe pain. The cartilage inside the joint may be injured. Other times only connecting ligaments surrounding the joint are injured. Facet pain also depends on which facet joint is affected. Facet joint pain can refer to other areas of the body.

Why are facet joint injections helpful?

The thoracic facet joints can cause pain in your back and other areas. A facet joint injection serves several purposes. First, by placing numbing medicine into the joint, the amount of immediate pain relief you experience will help confirm or deny the joint as a source of your pain. That is, if you obtain complete relief of your main pain while the facet joints are numb, then these joints are likely your pain source. Furthermore, time-release cortisone will be injected into these joints to reduce any presumed inflammation, which can, on many occasions, provide long-term pain relief.

What will happen to me during the procedure?

An IV will be started so that adequate relaxation medicine can be given, if needed. After lying on an x-ray table, the skin over the area of the spine to be treated will be well cleansed. Next, the physician numbs a small area of skin with numbing medicine (anesthetic), which stings for a few seconds. Next, the physician will use x-ray guidance to direct a very small needle into the joint. He then injects several drops of contrast dye to confirm that the medicine only goes into the joint. A small mixture of numbing medicine (anesthetic) and anti-inflammatory cortisone is then slowly injected.



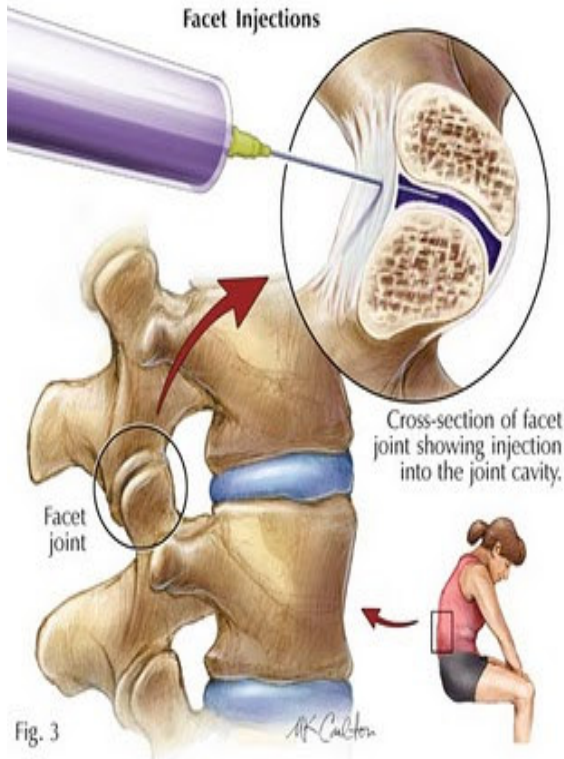


Fig. 3

What should I do after the procedure?

20-30 minutes after the procedure, you move your area of usual discomfort to try to provoke your usual pain. You report your remaining pain (if any) and record the relief you experience during the next week in a "pain diary" we provide*. You may or may not feel improvement during the first few hours after the injection. This depends on if the joints injected are your main pain source. The pain diary is an important component of your care. It helps your treating physician to be informed of your results so future tests and/or needed treatment can be planned.

How will I feel after the procedure?

On occasion, the part of your treated spine may feel slightly weak or odd for a few hours after the injection. You may notice a slight increase in your pain lasting for several days, as the numbing medicine wears off before the cortisone becomes effective.

Ice is typically more helpful than heat during the first 2-3 days after the injection.

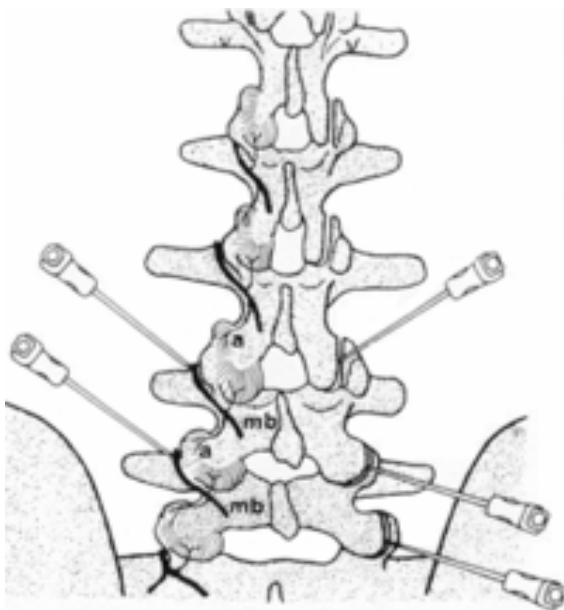
You may begin to notice an improvement in your pain 2-5 days after the injection. If you do not notice improvement within 10 days after the injection, it is unlikely to occur.

You may take your regular medications after the procedure, but try to limit any pain medications for the first 4-6 hours after the procedure. This will ensure that the diagnostic information obtained from the procedure is accurate.

You may be referred for physical, chiropractic treatment, or massage therapy after the injection while the numbing medicine is effective and/or over the several weeks while the cortisone is working.

When can I resume activity?

On the day of the injection you should not drive and should avoid any strenuous activities. On the day after the procedure, you may return to your regular activities.



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