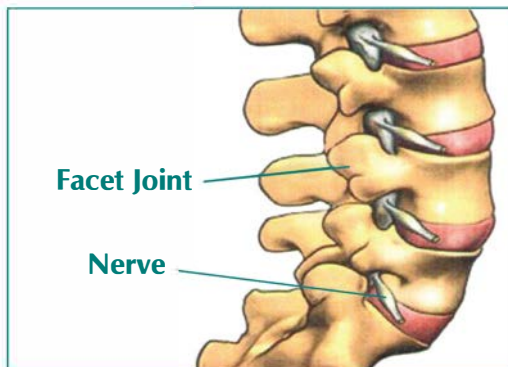


Diagnostic Medial Branch Blocks

This handout answers some of the most common questions patients have about diagnostic medial branch blocks. If you have other questions, please do not hesitate to call the Norman Prince Spine Institute at **401-444-3777** (Providence) or **401-845-1190** (Newport).

What is a diagnostic medial branch block?

A diagnostic medial branch block is a test to find the cause of your neck and back pain. During the test, your doctor will inject a numbing medication around the nerve that supplies your facet joints. These are the joints in your spine that allow you to bend and twist your neck and back. The amount of pain relief you feel after the injection will help your doctor determine the cause of your pain and how to treat it.



Do I have to do anything to prepare for the test?

Once your test is scheduled, we will give you instructions on how to prepare. For your safety, please tell us if you:

- Take a blood thinner (for example, warfarin/ Coumadin, Lovenox, or Plavix),
- Take any aspirin products or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (for example, Advil or Motrin) or naproxen (for example, Aleve),
- Have a condition that prevents your blood from clotting normally, or
- Have any allergies to latex, local anesthetics, X-ray dye, or seafood.

Please plan to have someone drive you home after your test. If you do not, the test will be canceled. Also, the test can be done only on a day when you have your typical pain. If you do not have your typical pain on the day the test is scheduled, we will need to cancel.

Does the test hurt?

Before the test begins, your doctor will inject you with a medication called a local anesthetic. This will numb the skin over the area of the facet joints. You may feel some stinging from the needle or the anesthetic. You may also feel some pressure when your doctor injects the numbing medication in the area around the facet joints.



What happens during the test?

A medial branch block generally involves the steps below:

1. Your vital signs (such as your blood pressure and pulse) will be measured. You will also be asked some general questions about your health.
2. You will lie on your stomach or on the procedure table. Then the area to be injected will be cleaned and covered with a special sheet. This will help keep the area free of germs.
3. The doctor will numb the area with a local anesthetic. Then he or she will inject contrast (a substance that will help highlight the area on X-rays). If you are allergic to contrast, your doctor will discuss your options with you.
4. The doctor will use a special X-ray to help place the needle in the right spot. Then he or she will insert the numbing medication in the area around the joints. Usually the doctor will need to make 6 injections (3 injections on each side of your spine).

The test takes about 10-15 minutes. You will be awake during the test and may ask questions at any time..

Are there any side effects from the test?

Side effects from a medial branch block are rare. The most common side effect is pain at the sites of injection. For a short while, you may also feel a little dizzy (if you had an injection in your neck) or numbness in your arm or leg.

What should I do after the test?

- Be as active as possible. Do the activities that usually cause pain in your neck or back. This will help your doctor know if your pain is caused by irritated facet joints.
- Keep track of your pain for 4 hours after your rest. Your doctor will give you a diary to write down your pain levels.



How will I feel after the test?

If you have pain relief after the test, you might have irritated facet joints. Daily wear and tear can bother these joints and cause your pain.

- Your doctor will work with you to find the best treatment option. A common option is a procedure called radiofrequency denervation. Your doctor will give you more information about this procedure.
- Your pain relief from the test will last only 3–4 hours. You will probably feel your regular level of pain afterward because the numbing medication will wear off.

If you have no pain relief after the test, your doctor will work with you to find the source of your pain and explore your treatment options.

For more information, please call the Norman Prince Spine Institute at [401-444-3777](tel:401-444-3777) (Providence) or [401-845-1190](tel:401-845-1190) (Newport).