

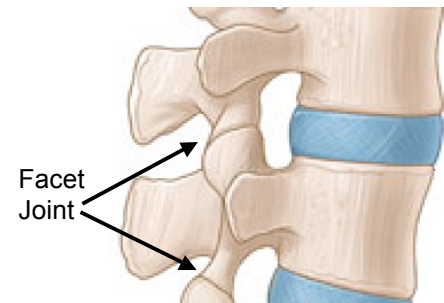
Medial Branch Block Injections

What is a Medial Branch Block Injection?

Physicians commonly use this type of injection to help diagnose and treat lower back pain. It is used for low back pain that stays above the knee. During a medial branch block injection, numbing medication or local anesthetic is placed directly around a medial branch nerve.

What are Medial Branch Nerves?

Medial branch nerves are the very small nerve branches that control sensation to a part of the spine called the facet joint. They do not control any muscles or sensations in your arms or legs. The facet joint is where each bone of the spine (vertebra) connects with the next. Sometimes, these facet joints can develop arthritis and be a source of pain.



What happens after this injection?

This type of injection can be both therapeutic and diagnostic. The result you have gives the physician more information about your pain and how best to treat it. Generally, one of the following three things may happen.

1. The pain does not go away. This means that the pain is probably not coming from the facet joints.
2. The pain goes away for a few hours but comes back again and does not get better. This would mean that the pain is probably coming from the joints.
3. The pain goes away, returns within a few hours, but then gets better over the next few days. This means that the medications had a long-lasting effect on the pain.

What if the pain goes away and then comes back?

You may be a candidate for another procedure called Radio Frequency Lesioning in which the medial branch nerve can be inactivated.

What is Radio Frequency Lesioning?

Radio Frequency Lesioning is a procedure that uses heat to interfere with the transmission of pain signals. During the procedure, an electrical current runs through a needle placed next to the nerve. This current will heat the nerve to 80° C for ninety seconds. Radio Frequency Lesioning can help relieve pain for up to a year.

Is this safe?

Yes, this procedure is safe. However, as with any procedure there are risks, side effects, and the possibility of complications. The anesthetic medication may spread to nearby nerves, and you may have weakness or numbness that can last for several hours. You may have increased pain for a few days after the injection, particularly at the location of the injection. People with diabetes may have a temporary elevation of their blood sugars.

Do these procedures hurt?

Most people say that the burning or stinging sensation due to the numbing medication is the most uncomfortable part. During the Radio Frequency Lesioning procedure, some people report feeling pain for 10-15 seconds that goes away afterward.

How are these procedures done, and how long do they take?

For both procedures, you will lay on your abdomen. Using the x-ray machine, your doctor will identify the target for needle placement. After anesthetizing the skin, the Medial Branch Block Injection or the Radio Frequency Lesioning procedure is performed. For a Medial Branch Block Injection, no sedation is given because it is important for you to tell the physician or nurse if the block has relieved your pain. For the Radio Frequency Lesioning procedure, a sedating medication is given.

Both the Medial Branch Block and Radio Frequency Lesioning are outpatient procedures done in the hospital. Depending on the location of the injection, each procedure takes between about 20 minutes and 2 hours. You will go home that same day.

Who shouldn't have these procedures?

People who are currently taking blood-thinning medications such as Coumadin/Warfarin should not have a Medial Branch Block Injection or Radio Frequency Lesioning. If you are taking any of these medications, you will need to stop taking them before the procedure. You should discuss this with your primary care provider or cardiologist in order to weigh the risks and benefits of stopping these medications.

When can I go back to my normal activities after these procedures?

You may not drive for the remainder of the day on the day the procedure is performed. You also should avoid using heat on the injected areas, taking a tub bath or soaking in water (i.e. pool, jacuzzi, etc.) for the rest of the day.

If the injections will be in your neck, you should not eat or drink for six hours before the procedure. You may take medications as usual with a sip of water. If the injections are to be in your lower back, you may eat, drink, and take your medications as usual on the day of the procedure (both before and after).

What do I do if these are not appropriate for my pain or I don't want one?

The treatment of chronic pain generally consists of several methods used in combination rather than just one method alone. Research has shown that physical therapy, medications, exercise, relaxation, and changing negative thought patterns can help people better manage pain. Discuss these and other options with your physician or chronic pain management specialist for more information.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

Call Kaiser Permanente if after the Medial Branch Block Injection or Radio Frequency Lesioning procedure, you experience any of the following:

- Increased pain
- Weakness
- Fever
- Swelling at the injection site

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Other resources

- Connect to our website at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- Your health, including your chronic pain, can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.