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WISCONSIN SPINE AND PAIN
INTERVENTIONAL PAIN SPECIALISTS

Medial Branch Block

PROCEDURE OVERVIEW

What is a Medial Branch? Your spine is made up of small bones called vertebrae. Each vertebra has flat surfaces called facets that touch where the vertebrae fit together. The space where the two facets meet creates a facet joint on each side of the vertebrae. The medial branch is a small group of nerves that sends sensation to the facet joints.

What is a Medial Branch Block?

A medial branch block is a diagnostic injection performed to determine if a specific facet joint or joints are the cause of a patient's pain. Facet joint pain occurs when one or more of the facet joints in your neck or back become irritated and swollen.

During this injection, medication is injected to "block" the nerves serving the painful facet joint(s). The duration of pain relief will vary depending on the medications injected. This injection is typically performed as a test injection and can provide several hours of pain relief. Although uncommon, risks may include infection, allergic reaction to the medications and nerve damage.

PREPARATION

Getting Ready for Your Procedure

To get ready for the injection, you will need to do the following:

• Tell your doctor the medications and herbal supplements you take, be sure to include aspirin and other over the counter medications. Ask whether you should stop taking any of your medications before the procedure. Refer to the medication form available at your clinic.

• Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or if you have any allergies, especially to medications, iodine or shellfish.

• For your protection, do not eat any food for at least 6 hours before your arrival time. You may drink clear liquids such as tea, black coffee, clear soda, clear juices (such as apple or cranberry) or water up to 2 hours before your arrival time but please do not drink any full liquids such as milk, orange or grapefruit juices.

• If asked, bring x-rays, MRIs or other tests with you on the day of your treatment.

• Do not take any pain medication for 6 hours prior to the injection.

The Day of the Procedure

The injection is performed in a hospital or outpatient surgery center.

• You may be examined by your physician and/or the nurses in the facility.

• You may be given an IV (intravenous) line for fluids or sedation medication.

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THE PROCEDURE

In the Procedure Room:

• You will lie on an exam table on your stomach or side. It is important to stay as still as you can.

• The skin over the injection site will be cleaned with cold soap. This may or may not be the same area where your pain is located.

• The doctor will numb the skin with a local anesthetic.

• Fluoroscopy (x-ray imaging) will be used to help your doctor see where the injection needs to go. A contrast "dye" may be injected into the region to help obtain a better image.

• An anesthetic to numb the region will be injected around the medial branch nerve.

POST PROCEDURE

After the Procedure

You can usually go home in about 30 minutes. You will need to have a responsible driver if you are planning to have sedation for the procedure. When the anesthetic wears off, you may feel more sore than usual. This is normal.

You will be asked to complete a pain diary to record your pain relief hourly after you go home. Bring this diary with you to your next appointment. If you have relief from your injection, you may need to complete one more test injection. If both test injections are successful at providing adequate pain relief, it may lead to a radiofrequency denervation procedure which offers long term relief.

Ask your doctor when it is okay to return to work. Your doctor will advise you when to schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss the results of your injection.