

# CERVICAL MEDIAL BRANCH BLOCKS

## FOR CHRONIC NECK PAIN & HEADACHE

A cervical medial branch block is an outpatient procedure for diagnosing and treating neck, shoulder, upper back and headache pain. This information sheet will explain if it is for you.

### What are cervical facet joints?

Facet joints connect the vertebrae, the bones of the spine. They help guide your spine when you move. The neck area of the spine is called the cervical region. It contains seven vertebrae.

Facet joints are found on both sides of the spine. Each is about the size of a thumbnail. Cervical facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. The right 2-3 facet joint, for example, joins the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> vertebrae on the right side.

Medial branch nerves are found near facet joints. They transmit pain signals from the facet joints to your brain.

### What is cervical facet pain?

You may feel pain if a cervical 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 joints are affected. Pain from cervical facet joints occurs in an area from your head down to your lower shoulder blade.

### How do I know if I have cervical facet pain?

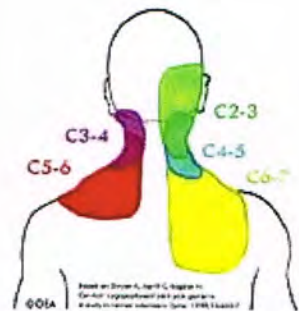
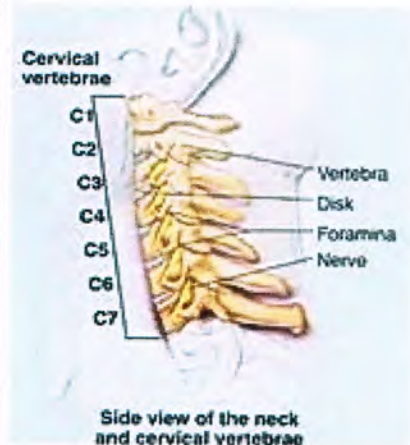
If you have pain in one or more of these areas, and it lasts longer than two months, you may have cervical facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRI's may not always show if a facet is causing pain.

### What is a cervical medial branch block?

In a cervical medial branch block, a local anesthetic (numbing medicine) is injected near the medial branch nerve. This stops the transmission of pain signals from the facet joint. If this reduces your pain and helps you move your neck like normal, it may tell the doctor which facet is causing the pain.

### What happens during an injection?

A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle near the medial branch nerve. X-ray must be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. X-ray dye may also be injected to make sure the needle is in the correct spot. Once the doctor is sure the needle is correctly placed, the anesthetic will be injected.



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### What happens after an injection?

You will be monitored for up to 60 minutes after the injection. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions.

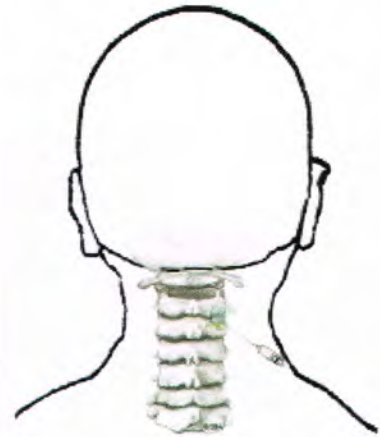
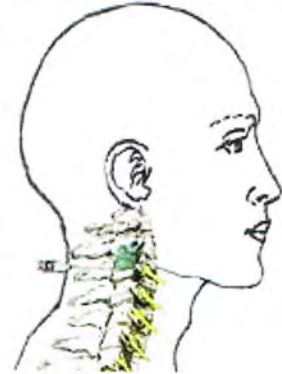
It may help you to move your neck in ways that hurt before the injection, to see if the pain is still there, but do not over do it.

Take it easy for the rest of the day. You may feel immediate relief and numbness in your neck for a limited period of time after the injection. This may indicate the medicine has reached the right spot. You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

### How long can I expect pain relief?

The extent and duration of pain relief may depend on the amount of inflammation and how many areas are involved. Other coexisting factors may be responsible for your pain.

If your pain goes away for a short time, but returns, you may be a Candidate for radiofrequency lesioning of the medial branch nerve. This procedure provides a more sustained disruption of pain signals, and often prolonged pain relief.



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