

Outpatient Pain Service

# Medial branch block injections

Information for patients



## What are medial branch block injections?

Long term or recurring low back pain can be as a result of injury or damage to the small joints in the back, called the facet joints. These are located between each vertebra (spinal bone). It has been estimated that injury or damage to the facet joints is the cause of pain in approximately 60% of people with back pain.

Medial branch nerves are found near the facet joints. They relay pain messages from the damaged facet joints to your brain. It is possible to block the medial branch nerves with local anaesthetic injections, which are guided into place using X-rays. These injections are called 'medial branch blocks'.

We use these to work out whether changes to the shape of your facet joints is the reason you are having pain, and to also locate the area where the pain is coming from.

You will be examined before the procedure and the consultant will explain where they are planning to inject the local anaesthetic, depending on the location of your pain.

## What are the risks and side effects of medial branch block injections?

Medial branch block injections are a safe treatment, but as with all medical procedures, there are some risks, such as:

- no reduction in your pain levels
- bruising
- infection
- pain after the procedure
- nerve damage (1 in 10,000 chance).

It is extremely unlikely that there will be damage to your spinal cord, as the needles do not enter this part of your back.

## What will happen when I come for the medial branch blocks?

The injections will be carried out in the Pain Relief Unit at the Churchill Hospital. This is an outpatient procedure, which means you will not need to stay in hospital overnight.

A nurse will complete a checklist with you before the procedure and will check your blood pressure, oxygen levels and pulse.

**If you are female and between 12 and 55 years old we will need you to fill in a form to confirm that you are not likely to be pregnant. This is because X-rays can harm unborn children.**

The doctor will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm you are happy for the procedure to go ahead. If there is anything you are unsure about, or if you have any questions, please ask the doctor or nurse before signing the consent form.

You will be given a theatre gown to change into and you will then be taken through to the treatment room.

You will be asked to lie on your front and X-rays will be used to confirm that the injections are being carried out at the correct level in your spine.

When you are ready, the pain consultant will inject local anaesthetic around the area that is to be treated, to numb the skin. This may sting to begin with, but will soon go numb.

Once your skin is numb, the medial branch block injections will be carried out. This will involve a series of injections using a small needle. The doctor will use the X-ray images to guide the injections to the correct area.

The procedure takes approximately 20 minutes. You will need to remain in the department for a minimum of 30 minutes after the procedure to recover.

**You will need someone to drive you home on the day of the tests. If you do not have a driver, we will not be able to carry out the procedure. We will need the driver to come and collect you from the department.**

You should not go home on public transport after this procedure. You will need to be taken home by car. This will be more comfortable for you and also quicker for you to return to the hospital if there are any complications on the journey home.

## What will happen after the medial branch blocks?

You will be given a pain diary to fill out, in which to record your response to the 'blocks'. You will be asked to score your pain on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 being no pain and 10 being severe) before and after the procedure. Continue noting your response in the pain diary as per the instructions. Please also make sure that you document the time that your pain returns to the level it was at before the injections.

Do not lie down and rest after the procedure. You must try to do activities that would usually bring the pain on.

Approximately two weeks after the procedure you will have a telephone appointment with one of the nurses, to assess the effects of the medial branch blocks.

Please do not lose the pain diary, as you will be asked for the results during your telephone appointment.

After this telephone appointment, you will either be booked for a second set of medial branch block injections, a review by one of the consultants in clinic, or you may be referred for a procedure called radiofrequency denervation of the nerves.

## How to contact us

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact:

### **Pain Relief Unit Nurse advice voicemail**

Tel: **01865 857 107**

Please leave a message and one of the nursing staff will return your call within four working days. For urgent advice, please contact your GP or NHS 111 (dial 111 freephone from mobiles and landlines).

Email: **[painreliefteam.ouh@nhs.net](mailto:painreliefteam.ouh@nhs.net)**

### **For appointment enquiries**

Tel: **01865 572 079**

(8.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)



If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **[PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk)**

Author: Oxford Pain Management Team 2015  
February 2016  
Review: February 2019  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Oxford OX3 9DU  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)

