

# arizonapain<sup>®</sup>treatmentcenters

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## Facet Joint Injections

Facet joints are small joints at each segment of the spine that provide stability and help guide motion. The facet joints can become painful due to arthritis of the spine, a back injury or mechanical stress to the back. A cervical (neck), thoracic (upper back) or lumbar (lower back) facet joint injection involves injecting an anesthetic and a steroid medication, which can anesthetize the facet joints and block the pain. The pain relief from a facet joint injection is intended to help a patient better tolerate rehabilitative therapy and to help identify the source of their pain.



Facet joint injections usually have two goals: to help diagnose the cause and location of pain and also to provide pain relief:

- *Diagnostic goals:* By placing numbing medicine into the joint, the amount of immediate pain relief experienced by the patient will help confirm or deny the joint as a source of pain.
- *Pain relief goals:* Along with the numbing medication, a facet joint injection also includes injecting anti-inflammatory steroid medication into the facet joints to reduce inflammation, which can often provide long term pain relief.

### Facet Joint Injection Procedure

As with many spinal injections, facet joint injections are best performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) for guidance to properly target and place the needle. The injection itself only takes a few minutes, but the entire procedure usually takes between thirty and sixty minutes. Patients may or may not obtain pain relief in the first few hours after the injection, depending upon whether or not the joints that were injected are the main source of the patient's pain. On occasion, the patient may feel numb or experience a slightly weak or odd feeling in the back for a few hours after the injection. On the day of the injection, patients are advised to avoid driving and avoid doing any strenuous activities.

The patient should record the levels of pain relief during the next few hours (6-8) in a pain diary. Tracking the level of pain is helpful to clearly inform the treating physician of the injection results and in planning future tests and/or treatment, as needed. Patients may continue to take their regular pain medicine after the procedure, with the exception of limiting pain medicine within the first six to eight hours after the injection so that the diagnostic information obtained is accurate.