

### **What are lumbar facet joints?**

Facet joints are found on both sides of the spine. Each is about the size of a thumbnail. The lumbar region of the spine contains five vertebrae and is located in the lower back. Lumbar facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. The right L4-5 facet joint, for example, joins the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> lumbar vertebrae on the right side. Medial branch nerves are the nerves that transmit pain signals from the facet joints to the brain.

### **What is lumbar facet joint pain?**

Lumbar facet joint pain is the result of joint dysfunction, either due to injury or irritation. Pain from an irritated lumbar facet joint may range from simple muscle tension to more severe pain. Depending on which facet joint is affected, the pain may occur in an area from the lower back into the buttocks and occasionally into the legs.

### **How do I know if I have lumbar facet pain?**

If you have pain in one or more of these areas and it has lasted longer than a few months, you may have lumbar facet pain.

### **What is a lumbar medial branch block?**

During this procedure, an anesthetic is injected over the medial branch nerve, which temporarily stops the transmission of pain signals from the facet joint. The injection is done only to diagnose pain coming from a chronically irritated facet joint. If the injection temporarily lessens your low back or buttock pain, then the doctor can be certain that the intended joint is the one causing the majority of your pain.

### **What happens during an injection?**

Unless otherwise discussed with your physician, you will NOT be receiving sedation for this procedure. It is recommended that you eat a normal meal prior to the procedure. A local anesthetic will be used to numb the skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle directly into the facet joint. If at any point in time the procedure becomes painful, you should let the doctor know. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, will be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. A dye will also be injected to make sure the medicine will go into the correct spot. Once the needle is in the correct location, an anesthetic will be injected.

### **What happens after an injection?**

You will be monitored for approximately 30 minutes after the procedure. Before you leave the clinic, you will be given discharge instructions. It is crucial that you keep track of your pain after the procedure as this will help your doctor determine the next step in treatment. You should check for pain by moving your back in ways that hurt before the injection, but do not overdo it. You should be able to return to work the day after the procedure.

### **How long can I expect pain relief?**

Pain relief will only last for a few hours. Any relief greater than eight hours is not the direct effect of the anesthetic but more do to relaxation of the painful muscles as a result of the needle itself. If your typical pain is significantly reduced for a few hours after the procedure, you may be a candidate for a radiofrequency neurotomy of the medial branch nerve. This procedure provides more permanent pain relief.

### **Questions**

The CORE Institute is dedicated to your outcome. If any questions or concerns arise, please call The CORE Institute at 1.866.974.2673.