

What are cervical facet joints?

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 C3-4 facet joint, for example, joins the 3rd and 4th vertebrae on the right side. Facet joints not only connect the vertebrae, but they also guide the spine during movement.

What is cervical facet joint pain?

Cervical facet joint pain is the result of joint dysfunction, either due to injury or irritation. Pain from an irritated cervical 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 head down to the shoulder blades.

How do I know if I have cervical facet pain?

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

What is a cervical radiofrequency neurotomy?

During this procedure, radiofrequency energy is used to disrupt function of a cervical medial branch nerve, so that it can no longer transmit pain from the irritated joint. This is a safe and very effective procedure for chronic pain stemming from the cervical facet joints.

What happens during an injection?

This procedure is normally done with intravenous sedation. Sedation will require that you fast for four hours prior to the procedure. If you will not be having sedation, we recommend 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 as he can use more anesthetic to numb the painful area. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, will be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. The doctor will then check that the needle is in the proper position by stimulating the nerve. This may cause muscle twitching. When the needle is in the correct position, the area will be numbed. Radiofrequency energy will then be used to disrupt the medial branch nerve. This often feels warm or tingly, but should not be painful.

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. Please keep track of your pain as this will help your doctor determine the next step in treatment. It is normal to feel better immediately after the procedure. This is the effect of the anesthetic. It will most likely wear off a few hours after the procedure. You may feel sore for a few days after the procedure. This is normal and is caused by mild muscle or nerve irritation. Full pain relief takes anywhere from two to four weeks. You should be able to return to work the day after the procedure.

How long can I expect pain relief?

Nerves have to regenerate after a radiofrequency neurotomy procedure. The typical duration of pain relief is 10 – 16 months. If your pain returns at that time, the procedure can be repeated.

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.