



Cervical, Thoracic and Lumbosacral Medial Branch Block

What are the medial branch nerves and why are medial branch blocks helpful? - Medial branch nerves are the very small nerve branches that communicate pain caused by the facet joints in the spine. These nerves do not control any muscles or sensation in the arms or legs. They are located along a bony groove in the low back and neck and over a bone in the mid back.

If this procedure has been scheduled, there is strong evidence to suspect that the facet joints are the source of your neck/back pain. Therefore, benefit may be obtained from having these medial branch nerves blocked with an anesthetic to see if a more permanent way of blocking these nerves would provide long-term pain relief. Blocking these medial branch nerves temporarily stops the transmission of pain signals from the joints of the spine to the brain.

General Pre-Injection Instructions – Please tell your doctor if you have any allergies, particularly to iodine, topical or intravenous. You may eat a light meal 6 hours before the procedure. If you are an insulin-dependent diabetic, you must not change your normal eating pattern prior to the procedure. You may take your routine medications (i.e., high blood pressure and diabetic medications, e.g. Glucophage). However, you will need to take only half of your usual dose of insulin the day of the procedure. You should hold your pain medications or anti-inflammatory medications the day of your procedure. If you are on a blood thinner (Coumadin, Plavix, Lovenox, etc.), you must notify your physician's office so the timing of the discontinuation of these medications can be explained. **A driver must accompany the patient and be responsible for getting him/her home.**

What happens during the procedure? – You will be placed on an X-ray table on your stomach. The x-ray machine is positioned so the physician can best visualize the bony areas where the medial branch nerves pass, using x-ray guidance. The skin is scrubbed using antibacterial soap. Next, the physician numbs a small area of skin with numbing medicine. This medicine stings for several seconds. After the numbing medicine has been given time to be effective, the physician directs a very small needle using x-ray guidance near the specific nerve being tested. Then, a small mixture of numbing medicine (local anesthetic) and perhaps steroid (at your doctor's discretion) is injected. This usually does not provoke your usual pain.

The physician will use an x-ray machine during this procedure. If you are pregnant, it is important to inform your physician.

What happens after the procedure? - Immediately after the procedure, you will be asked to get off the x-ray table and imitate actions that would normally bring about your usual pain. You are then asked to report the percentage of pain relief.

The arm(s), chest wall or leg(s) may feel weak or numb for a few hours. This is uncommon, but occasionally happens following medial branch blocks.

No driving is allowed on the day of the procedure. You must bring someone to drive you home after the procedure.