

The Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation

Medial branch blocks

Information for patients

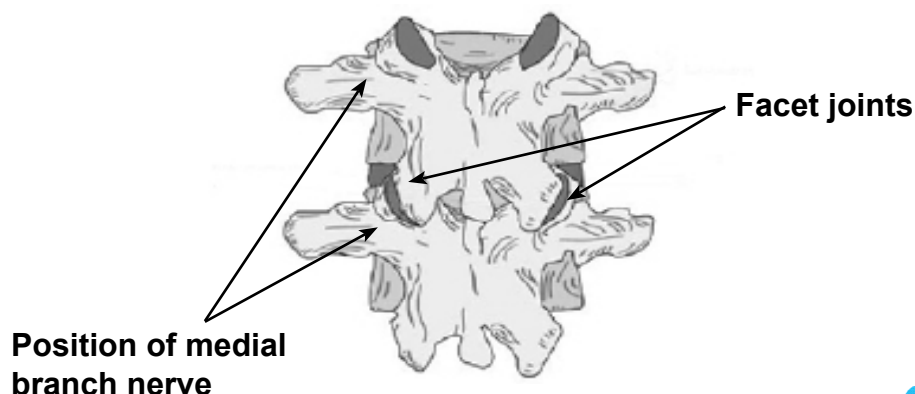
This leaflet provides information about **medial branch blocks** for chronic pain relief. If you have any questions, please speak to your GP or other relevant healthcare professional.

What is a medial branch block?

A medial branch block is a procedure where pain-blocking medicine is injected around a specific facet joint. The nerve block temporarily prevents the pain signal from being carried by the medial branch nerves that supply this facet joint.

Facet joints are small linking joints that connect the bones of the spine, also known as vertebrae. They work with the discs, and are responsible for controlling the twisting and sideways movements of the whole spine. Facet joints are found on each side of the spine.

Usually these joints cause no pain at all, however if they become inflamed or arthritic (also known as 'wear and tear') they can become painful.



Medial branch nerves are very small nerves that allow you to feel pain from facet joints. These nerves do not control any muscles or feeling in your arms or legs. They are located along a bony groove in your lower back, neck, and over a bone in your mid-back. These nerves carry the pain signals to your spinal cord and the signals eventually reach your brain, where the pain is noticed.

How will medial branch blocks help?

Medial branch blocks may be used as a diagnostic test, to see whether your pain started from particular facet joints. These blocks are not a cure but may reduce your pain temporarily. The outcome of having this treatment will be one of the following.

1. The pain does not go away at all. This means that the pain is probably not coming from your facet joints. This can help diagnose your problem and guide us with any future treatment.
2. The pain goes away for a few hours or days, then comes back and does not improve. This would mean the block was also of diagnostic value. The pain is probably coming from your joints, but the steroid did not benefit your joints.
3. The pain goes away after the block. The pain may even come back after a day or two, but then gets better over the next week or so. This means that the block was of therapeutic value - the steroid had a long lasting effect on your pain.

What are the possible risks and side effects?

- There may be some **pain and bruising** at the needle site, which should settle over a few days.
- You may **feel a little unsteady** when you first stand.
- The injections may **make your pain worse**. This should settle within a few weeks.
- There is a small risk of **infection** at the site of your injections.
- You may have some **leg weakness or numbness**, which should settle within a few hours. If this happens you may have to stay in Day Surgery until this goes away.
- **Diabetics may have raised blood sugar levels** in the short-term.

What happens during my procedure?

Medial branch blocks are carried out as a day case procedure (you can go home on the same day). The procedure is carried out in one of the theatres in Day Surgery to minimise your risk of getting an infection. Shortly before your procedure you will be asked to change in to a theatre gown.

The procedure

- The procedure is carried out under x-ray. This allows the doctor to identify the specific area to be treated. **It is important that you tell your consultant if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, as x-rays may harm your baby.**
- You will be asked to lie down on your front. Once you are laying in the correct position, your doctor will prepare the area to be treated with an antiseptic solution which may feel cold.
- A local anaesthetic is injected at the site of the procedure. This may sting to start with, before your skin goes numb.
- It is important that you keep still during the procedure, as a special hollow needle will be carefully inserted under x-ray control into the correct position. A preparation of steroid and a local anaesthetic are injected; this may reduce inflammation and pain.
- The above may be repeated at different levels on your spine.
- A small dressing will be used to cover the injection sites. This can be removed after 24 hours. Do not worry if it falls off sooner.

What will happen after my injections?

- You will be discharged home one to two hours after your procedure.
- You must not drive for 24 hours following your procedure; please arrange for someone to drive you home from the hospital. We also strongly recommend that you have someone stay at home with you until the following day.
- You should start your normal activities as soon as possible. However, you should avoid any strenuous activities for at least one day after your injections.
- You may notice an immediate improvement, but improvement can be delayed for a few days. Sometimes there may be a slight increase in pain for 24 to 48 hours. Steroids work slowly, so even if the injections have worked well, you may not notice any improvement for several days.

Will I need a follow-up appointment?

You will be contacted by telephone in six to eight weeks for a follow-up appointment.

Further information

If you have any concerns regarding the information in this leaflet or your procedure, please phone the Pain Clinic.

Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation (direct lines)

- Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury Telephone: 01227 78 30 49
- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate Telephone: 01843 23 50 94
- William Harvey Hospital, Ashford Telephone: 01233 61 66 91

Useful information

For further information on chronic pain and its treatment options, please go to the East Kent Hospitals Chronic Pain web page www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/chronic-pain-leaflets

- Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Royal College of Anaesthetists. Information sheet for adult patients undergoing: Facet Joint Medial Branch Blocks for the treatment of pain.

Web: fpm.ac.uk/sites/fpm/files/documents/2019-11/FPM-PIL-Facet-joint-medial-branch-block-Sep-2019-ed.pdf

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation