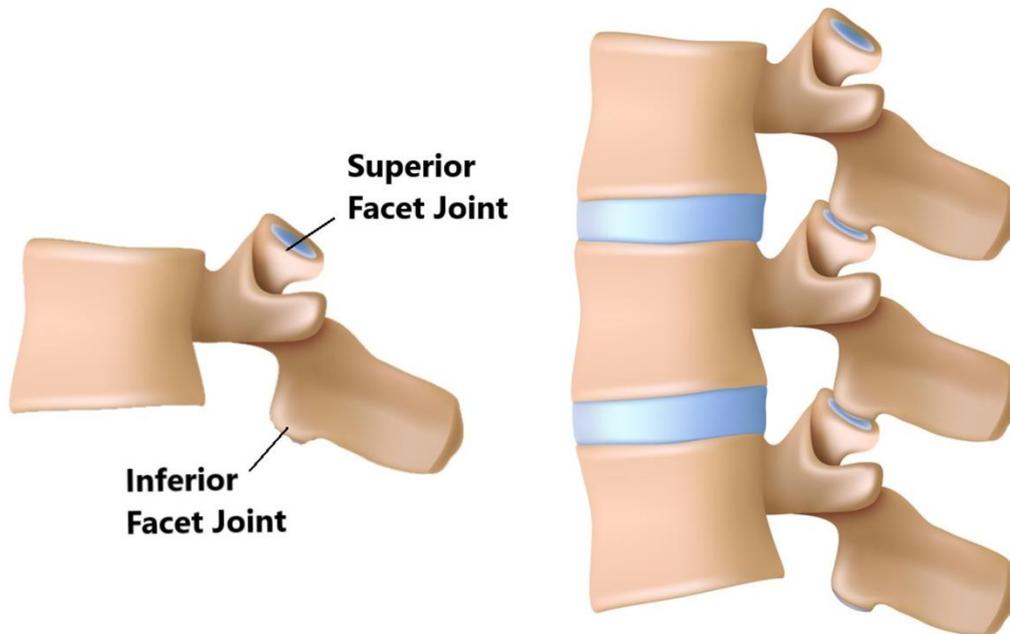


Treating pain from facet joints - TEST FIRST THEN TREAT

The facet joints are common sources of pain in the back or neck. There is a pair of facet joints at each level of your spine from the neck down to the top of the tail bone (sacrum). Like any other joint in the body these joints can show signs of “wear and tear” as we get a bit older.



How do we treat pain from facet joints?

The first step is to check that the pain is coming from the facet joints more than other structures in the back or neck.

The first procedure you will be booked for is a **medial branch block**. **This is a diagnostic procedure only and provides no long-lasting pain relief.** Simply, a small amount of local anaesthetic (just like what the dentist does to numb a tooth) is put in the back where the nerves to the facet joints sit. We simply see if the pain you experience is reduced by numbing the nerve from those joints.

You will be asked to fill out a block assessment sheet to see what happens to your pain for the first 3 days after the procedure. Please email, fax and post this form back to the office at Northern Beaches Pain Management.

This procedure is done under very light sedation, in hospital with a consultant anaesthetist. Please note: you must have someone to take you home and stay with you overnight if you have sedation.

In some situations we will repeat this diagnostic test.

The treatment procedure only occurs if you have had a positive response to the diagnostic injections. This is called a **radiofrequency neurotomy** and here the nerves are cauterised (a tiny localised burn to the nerve). **This can take up to two months to get to peak effect.** Most people feel a localised feeling like sunburn in the skin whilst they are healing after the procedure which responds to simple pain medicines like Paracetamol. This procedure too is done under very light sedation with a consultant anaesthetist, and you will need someone to take you home and stay with you overnight if you have sedation.

Risks

These procedures are very safe and undertaken extremely commonly. You will be asked to sign a consent form by your doctor before the procedure. The risks include failure of this procedure to provide you adequate pain relief, worsening of your pain, infection, bruising and bleeding. Serious complications are extraordinarily rare.

Important points

- Before the procedure, you must tell your doctor if you take blood thinning medications eg Warfarin, if you have been unwell lately and if you have any allergies
- You must have someone to take you home and stay with you overnight if you have sedation
- The diagnostic tests (Medial branch blocks) provide no long lasting pain relief but just tell us where the pain is coming from
- After the medial branch block (diagnostic injections) please send the block assessment sheet back to Northern Beaches Pain Management via email or fax and post.
- Some discomfort where the needles have been sited, particularly after the radiofrequency, is common. Call Northern Beaches Pain Management if this is persisting.
- If you have any reduced strength in the leg (after lumbar procedure) or arm (after a neck procedure) please attend your nearest Emergency Department immediately.
- For mild pain, ice and paracetamol can be helpful or anti inflammatories such as Ibuprofen

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