

## Medial Branch Block

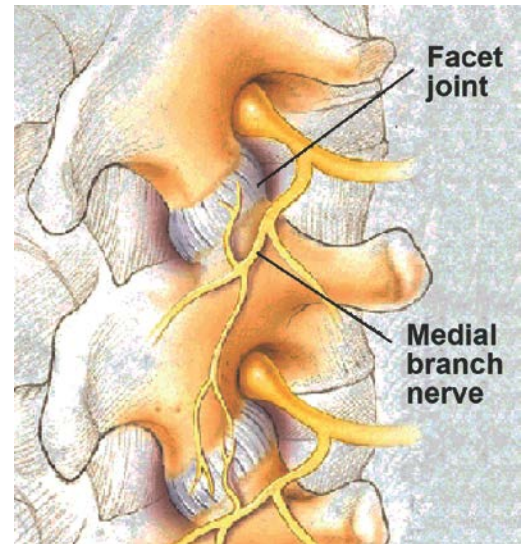
### *Benefits, risks, what to expect, and how to prepare*

*This handout explains a medial branch block, an injection that helps your doctor find what is causing your pain.*

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

Each vertebra (small bone) in your spine has flat areas called *facets*. They touch where the vertebrae fit together, forming a *facet joint*. Each facet joint has 2 *medial branch nerves*.

In a *medial branch nerve block injection*, local *anesthetic* (numbing) medicine is injected to the medial branch nerves that connect to the facet joints of the spine.



*Medial branch nerves connect to the facet joints of the spine.*

### **Will this injection reduce my pain?**

This injection is not a treatment. It is used to find the source of your pain. It can tell your provider if a certain nerve is involved in the pain you are feeling.

The *local anesthetic* (numbing medicine) used in the injection may give you pain relief right away. The pain relief can last several hours, but it is only short-term.

Depending on the results of this injection, your provider may suggest another type of procedure or treatment.

### **What are the risks?**

Medial branch block has been linked with:

- Infection
- Bleeding or fluid leakage in the spinal cord
- Nerve damage
- Ongoing increase in pain

## **Contrast Reaction**

*Contrast* (X-ray dye) may also be injected as a part of this procedure. Contrast helps images show more clearly on X-rays.

If you have ever had an allergic reaction to contrast:

- You are at risk for having another reaction.
- Tell your provider about your contrast allergy **before** your procedure.

## **Other Risks**

Other serious problems are also possible after this type of injection, but they are very rare. Talk with your doctor about these risks.

## **What can I expect?**

- You will lie on your stomach or on your side on an exam table.
- If you are having sedation, you will receive it at this time. The sedation will help you relax, but you will not be asleep. You need to be able to talk and answer questions during the procedure.
- We may use local anesthetic to numb your skin where the needle will be inserted.

When you are ready, your doctor will:

- Use X-ray or ultrasound to guide the needle to the right place.
- Inject *contrast* into the area, if this is part of your procedure.
- Give you the nerve block injection.

## **How long does the procedure take?**

Plan to spend 2 hours at the clinic, from the time you are admitted until you can leave. The injection itself takes about 15 minutes.

## **How do I prepare?**

### **1 Week Before**

- You must stop taking all blood-thinning (*anticoagulant*) medicines some time in the week before your injection. If you are taking any of the medicines listed below, talk with your prescribing doctor as soon as you schedule your injection to find out when to stop your blood-thinning medicine:
  - Coumadin (warfarin), Edoxaban (savaysa), Effient (prasugrel), Eliquis (apixaban) Plavix (clopidogrel), Lovenox (enoxaparin), Pletal (cilostazol), Pradaxa (dabigatran), Teclid (ticlopidine), Xarelto (rivaroxaban)

Please call the pain clinic if you have not been able to talk to your doctor about stopping your blood-thinning medicine 1 week before the injection. We will need to reschedule your injection for a later date.

- If you take low-dose aspirin or anti-inflammatory medicines, we will tell you if you need to stop these medicines before your medial branch block.

### **Morning of the Injection**

- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Follow your doctor's instructions for reducing your pain medicine before your injection.
- You may eat and drink as usual, unless you were given other instructions.
- Plan to arrive at least 45 minutes before your appointment.
- Plan to spend at least 2 hours at the clinic.

### **After Your Injection**

- We advise you not to drive or use machinery for 24 hours after your injection.
- We may send you home with instructions to keep a pain diary. Please follow the instructions closely.
- Be sure you have follow-up visits set up as needed with your pain provider, primary care provider, or both.

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your pain clinic if you have questions or concerns.

- Harborview Pain Clinic:**  
206.744.7065
- UWMC Center for Pain Relief:** 206.598.4282 (Call any time of day, 7 days a week)