

CERVICAL FACET EVALUATION

WHAT ARE FACETS?

The spine has highly sensitive joints connecting each vertebrae the head to the tail bone in the back of the spine. In the CERVICAL region these joints restrict your ability to tilt your head backwards, bend side to side and to rotate. The facet joints, like any other joint, may develop pain or arthritis after and injury.

Cervical Facet Evaluation helps to determine whether or not one or more of the cervical facets are partly responsible for pain, which may be in the neck, between the shoulder blades, and across the top of the shoulders as well as for headaches.

HOW IS IT DONE?

The evaluation can be done two ways:

1. One way is to block (temporarily anesthetize) the nerves that go to the facet joints felt to be the source of some pain. This is accomplished by placing a small amount of local anesthesia through a small needle at designated locations with the assistance of fluoroscopy (moving X-rays). Relief of pain only occurs if the facets studied are part of the pain pattern and the relief may last only an hour or so. This is strictly diagnostic. There can be false positives (pain relief) from the placebo effect and from spread of the local anesthesia to the wrong nerves. (cervical medial branch block)
2. Another way is to place a small amount of local anesthetic and steroid into the facet joint. This approach can have a short-term therapeutic effect as the steroid may relieve the pain for weeks and months.

WHY DO IT?

If the facet evaluation provides significant pain relief, then one can consider doing a Radio Frequency Neurolysis, that is, heating the tiny nerves (medial branch nerves) to the facets to prevent transmission of pain for longer periods of time.

TIME?

The facet evaluation may take 30 to 45 minutes. Light sedation helps to make the patient comfortable during this procedure.

RISKS

There are minimal risks associated with this procedure.