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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Lumbar facet joint injections (page 1 of 2)

Why do I need this injection?

Your doctor thinks your pain may be due to arthritis or strain to the small joints of your lower back causing you back pain and 'referred' pain in the legs. There is usually muscle spasm in the area close to the joints and this makes movements of the back stiff and painful.

Facet joint arthritis can show up on X-ray, MRI scans and during examinations.

How does the injection work?

A small amount of steroid and local anaesthetic is injected into the area of affected joints. This produces an anti-inflammatory effect and may relieve pain and muscle spasm.

What are the benefits?

You should notice less pain and stiffness in 3 – 5 days or so. This can last for several weeks or months. In a few patients it can last longer.

What are the risks?

- **Commonly** - local soreness / bruising at the injection site, which usually settles after a few days.
- **Occasionally** - temporary aggravation of pain, usually due to increased muscle spasm in reaction to the injection passing through some spinal muscles. This usually settles spontaneously.
- **No pain relief** - if the treatment did not help, it may mean your back pain has some other cause. This is the most common outcome.
- **Infection** - this is extremely rare, but can happen with any injection. In the worst case it could lead to an abscess, if untreated. Infection is minimised by performing the procedure under sterile conditions. The injection will not be done if you have an infection elsewhere in the body. Diabetics or patients receiving treatment that lowers the immunity are generally more at risk of infection.
- **Anaphylaxis** - severe allergic reaction to one of the components in the injection. It is extremely rare. Before the injection please tell your doctor of any drug allergies.

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What are the alternatives?

You can carry on as you are or discuss alternative medications or therapy with your doctor.

How is the injection performed?

Lumbar facet joint injections are performed with you lying face down on a bed.

You can keep your underwear on but you may need to remove outer clothes and wear a gown.

The lower back area is cleaned with antiseptic solution and then each affected joint is numbered with a short acting local anaesthetic. You may experience stinging for a short while.

Using X-ray guidance, a fine needle is inserted into each facet joint area. A small amount of a mixture of a longer lasting anaesthetic and steroid is then injected. This can temporarily cause an aching feeling.

The procedure takes about 15 minutes, your doctor will tell you at each stage what he is doing.

After the injection the area may be sprayed with a waterproof dressing. It is safe to shower or have a bath later that day.

After the injection

You will need to rest for 15 minutes or so in a chair in the ward area. You may be offered a cup of tea and may sit with whoever brought you to the hospital.

Once you are at home

- We advise you to be driven home or accompanied home afterwards.
- You will need to take it gently for the rest of the day. Please do not overuse or strain your back over the next few days. It is, however, possible to return to work if you feel able to do so the following day (providing your work is not too strenuous).
- You will be given a questionnaire sheet which you should return to your doctor two months after the injection to let him know how you are progressing.

Serious complications are extremely rare. There are some **warning 'red flag' signs** or symptoms that require prompt medical attention.

If you suffer any of the following signs or symptoms, please see your GP promptly, or attend your nearest Casualty/Accident and Emergency Department:

- The area around the injection site becomes sore, red or inflamed.
- You have increasing pain after the initial 2 - 3 days.
- You feel unwell and feverish, which you cannot link to another cause.
- You notice a change in sensation (tingling or numbness) in your back or perineal area. (This area is sometimes called the 'saddle area' and lies between the top of your legs and includes the front and back passage)
- You are unable to control your bladder or bowel actions.
- You experience any other symptoms that worry you.

Please do not wait for it to get better on its own. It is better to have your symptoms checked if you are concerned.

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