

Medial Branch Block

1. What are the medial branch nerves and what is a medial branch block?

Medial branch nerves are very small nerves that carry the pain message from the facet joints and the muscles around the joints. If the nerves are blocked or numbed, they will not be able to transfer the pain sensation from the joints to the brain. If your doctor thinks those nerves may be the source of your pain, he will block the nerves temporarily as a test. If you do not have your pain for 4-6 hours after the test is done, we will know we targeted the correct medial branch nerves causing the pain. We do perform two tests to ensure relief and for insurance purposes. If you have two successful tests we will advance to a procedure called Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA). During this procedure the doctor will lesion the nerves to numb them for a long period of time (9 months to permanent).

3. What are the risks of the procedure?

As with most procedures, there is a remote risk of bleeding, infection, nerve injury or allergic reaction to the medications used. Some short-term side effects may occur, as well. You may have increased pain for a few days after the injection, including localized pain at the injection site. Diabetics may have a short-term elevation of blood sugars. People prone to fluid retention may have increased fluid retention for one to two weeks.

4. What happens during the procedure?

When you enter the clinic, you will be taken into an admission room where a nurse will check your vitals. Please wear loose-fitting clothing and note that you may be asked to change into a hospital gown. After your vitals are taken, an IV will be placed so that you can receive sedation during the procedure. Once you have been escorted to the procedure room, our nursing staff will then position you on narrow table. The site of the procedure will be cleaned with iodine and sterilely draped. Once sterilized, the physician will numb your skin with a small needle – the numbing process may sting. Do your best to lay still and let us know if we are causing you discomfort.

Next, the doctor will use an X-ray machine (fluoroscope) to guide the needle into the correct spot. Local anesthetic will then be injected through the needle and then the needle is removed. Your skin will be cleaned and a Band-Aid applied. The Band-Aid may be removed the next morning. The procedure will last approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Your pain may improve immediately after the injection, due to the local anesthetic.

5. What happens after the procedure?

You will go to a recovery area in a wheelchair and your IV will be removed. You will need someone with you to drive you home after the procedure. Discharge instructions will be reviewed with you and your driver. You will be asked to go out and do things that would normally aggravate your pain. If you have relief of your pain for a few hours after the procedure, this means those nerves may be the source of your pain.

Sometimes, you may feel soreness at the injection site following the injection. Ice packs at the injection site will help with the soreness. You may notice a slight increase in your pain lasting for several days as the numbing medication wears off. You may take your regular medications 6 hours after the procedure so that the doctor can determine the pain relief from the injection.

6. Will I have any restrictions after the procedure?

Following your procedure, if you have had sedation you are not allowed to drive for the remainder of the day. An adult must be present to drive you home or to escort you on another form of transportation. This is for your own safety. Otherwise, you may do whatever you feel up to doing.

7. For what reasons should I call Pain Specialists of Charleston after the injection?

You should call us immediately at 843-818-1181 if you experience any of the following:

- Severe back pain that is not relieved with medication and ice
- Prolonged, new numbness or weakness of your legs
- Signs of infection in the area of injection

NOTE: If you experience loss of bladder and/or bowels control OR difficulty breathing, please go to the nearest emergency room immediately.

Things to Do Before the Procedure

1. Any dietary restrictions will be discussed on the day the procedure appointment is booked.
2. Take all of your medications as scheduled on the day of the procedure, unless directed otherwise.
3. Think of any questions for us and write them down.
4. Make the nurses and doctors aware of any new changes in your medical condition.
5. Before you come in, let us know if you are taking any blood thinners (e.g., aspirin, Coumadin, Plavix, Pletal) or anti-inflammatories.
6. Please remember to arrange for an adult to drive you home.

Pain Specialists of Charleston is committed to quality healthcare.

If you have questions about our policies, please see a Pain Specialists of Charleston representative.

If you are interested in learning more about our practice or treatment solutions,
please visit www.PainChas.com