

## Facet Joint Injections

The decision to consent to facet joint injections was not an easy one. My consultant took considerable time to try and convince me, and then even stuck with it despite there not being any distinctly clear point to inject - but then my anatomy isn't exactly the best in that region.

I had to be chaperoned to the appointment, otherwise they would not have been able to discharge me - I was admitted into the hospital for the procedure. Two ID bands, and admission checks later, I was sent to the ward. The staff were lovely but essentially none of them had bothered to read my notes to know why I was even there, luckily the consultant radiologist knew though so that was the main thing.

He went through the risks with me; paralysis, nerve damage, bleeding etc. through to side effects, what he was going to do, asked if I had any questions, then gave me the consent form to sign. He asked where it was most painful then made the decision then that he would inject from both sides (bilateral injections). Always helps when the consultant has a great sense of humour, I was not nervous/scared at all - I find it is best not to think about these things.

He temporarily passed me over to the radiology nurses who ensured I wasn't pregnant, got me prepped on the CT scanner and taped my neck up with guidance grids ready to mark the insertion points. That took a few minutes because they wouldn't stick, but it wasn't uncomfortable, the rest was the same process as any normal CT scan. I could see the screen so I knew what they were scanning, once they had the first set of images, one of the nurses marked my neck whilst the consultant familiarised himself with a whole load of other imaging.

Eventually the consultant came and gloved up. I asked him if it would hurt, he reassured me it wouldn't hurt a lot, but essentially it would. He then sterilised my neck and numbed both sides with local anaesthetic (Lidocaine). During the two minute wait for it to kick in, he covered me with a sterile sheet and prepped the needles and drugs. He inserted the needle on the right first, then the left, it was uncomfortable and it made my toes curl but it was bearable. Once the needles were in, I was brought out of the scanner, and I could see on the screen exactly where the needles were even though I couldn't move and wasn't stupid enough to try and touch them.

When he injected the drugs, he did it in two goes from what it felt, there was an additional pain then an increased level on top of that, I kept my eyes closed firmly shut for that part. He repeated the process on the other side which hurt slightly more, because that is the most painful side anyway. As soon as the drugs were in, he removed the needles and dressed the areas with sterile plasters. I of course was testing movement the entire time by flexing my hands - all movement was maintained throughout.

I had to lie there for a few minutes, I used the time to ask to see the needles; they were a lot shorter than anticipated, but wider than I thought they would be - I could see the hollow throughout it, he explained why he chose those needles and laughed that it was typical for me to want to see them. My chaperone was allowed in then, the drugs had gone straight to my head and made my dizzy basically so that was fun - felt like head rush. At one point I thought they were moving the table but they weren't. I stood to change out of the hospital

gown but I wasn't stable enough to walk so I was seated in a wheelchair for the trip back to the ward.

The nurses told my consultant how I was feeling, he reminded me of the pain diary, I thanked him for doing the procedure right. He was rightly justified in his claims of being excellent - 100% record of never screwing up, and I didn't change that for him. He told me not to remove the waterproof dressings for at least 48 hours and that once I had rested and was feeling better I was good to go.

Back on the ward, I lay down, and couldn't get comfortable or sleep, eventually I gave up trying but stayed lying down. Once I had drunk fluids and passed it, they did discharge checks and I was good to go. The injection sites were tender after, and I felt a bit out of it, but I was otherwise good. I was up and running again in the morning, but was shattered by the afternoon and slept for a while. Now two days post injections, and dressings removed, still having occasional headaches, medicating when needed and naps/rest still required as of yet, but no real adverse reactions.

Too early to say how successful they have been. Pain diary details pre-pain then post pain at 15 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours, 4 hours and then 24 hours following procedure - the rest is weekly and has been requested for 6 weeks, though I am seeing my neurosurgeon later this month, so that it going with me there. Will let you know how this progresses in due time.

- *I went back to university the day after the injections, not sure why now, but I remember being in the student union with paperwork*