

Spinal Injections

A spinal injection is a procedure in which your doctor injects medicine into a specific area of your spine to either diagnose the source of your back pain or to reduce swelling and relieve your pain.

What are the types of injections?

The types of injection you will have depends on your symptoms, the location of your pain, and your treatment goals. The most common are:

- **Epidural [ep-i-DOO R-uh l] steroid injections (cortisone)** near specific nerves or directly into the **epidural space** (the area that surrounds the nerves within the spinal canal)

- **Facet joint injections and nerve blocks** in or near the facet joints that connect each **vertebra** [VUR-tuh-bruh]
- **Sacroiliac [sak-roh-il-ee-ak] (or SI) joint injections** into the SI joint between the sacrum and pelvic bones

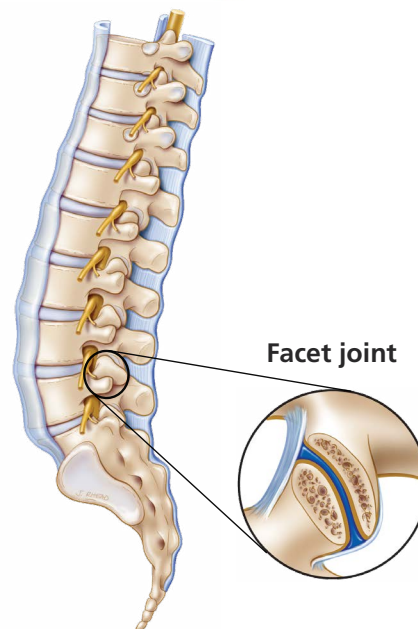
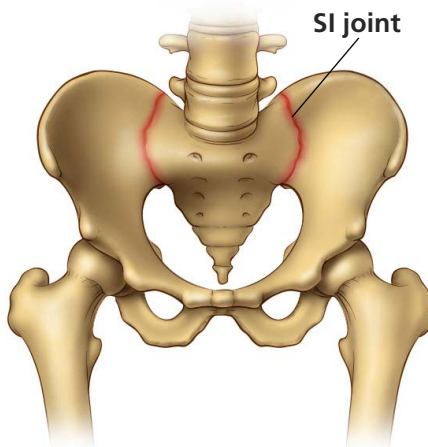
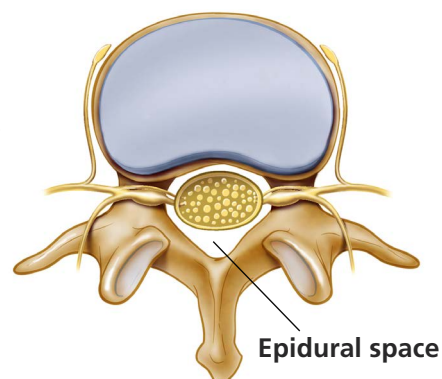
Other types of spinal injections — diagnostic discograms, neurotomies, and trigger point injections — are described on separate fact sheets.

Epidural steroid injections can treat pain in a large region of the body. Steroid medicine is injected into the epidural space between 2 vertebrae or near a nerve. The medicine moves up and down the spinal canal to coat the nerve roots near the injection area.

Facet joint injections are given where 2 vertebrae join together. These joints allow the spine to bend and twist. Facet joint injections can decrease inflammation caused by arthritis and joint degeneration.

Before a facet joint injection, you may be given a diagnostic injection called a **medial branch block** near a nerve leading from the facet joint. This helps determine if a facet joint injection might relieve your pain. Your doctor may also recommend a radiofrequency **neurotomy** [noo-rot-uh-mee], which disables a spinal nerve so it can no longer send pain signals.

Sacroiliac (SI) joint injections are given into the SI joint, located between the sacrum (at the base of the spine) and pelvic bones. The doctor injects an anti-inflammatory medicine directly into the joint that can reduce pain and inflammation in your lower back, buttocks, groin, and leg.



Why do I need this?

You might need a spinal injection if you have back pain that has not responded to physical therapy or other treatments. An alternative to back surgery, spinal injections can be used to:

- **Diagnose your pain:** Your doctor will inject numbing medicine (anesthetic) into 1 or more specific areas of your spine, blocking all feeling in those areas. If the pain is relieved, the doctor will better understand the source and how to treat it. If not relieved, then there may be a different source that may require more or different types of injections for a sound diagnosis.
- **Relieve your pain:** Your doctor can use spinal injections to relieve your pain, reduce swelling, or improve mobility. An anti-inflammatory medicine, such as cortisone, is injected directly into the place the pain comes from. Depending on the medicine injected, you may feel pain relief right away, or it may take a few days or more to take effect. Pain relief may be temporary (lasting several weeks or months) or long lasting.

What kind of pain relief can I expect?

If your injection is for diagnosing pain, you should feel relief right away from the anesthetic, but the relief will end in about an hour or so. You may need more than one injection for the doctor to diagnose the pain.

If your injection is for reducing inflammation and relieving pain, it can take a few days, or even a week, to feel relief. Your pain will go away slowly and steadily.

The injection may not relieve all your pain, but it may relieve enough of the pain to allow you to move around more easily. This can help you recover faster.

How long you can expect pain relief to last depends on how many areas are injured and the amount of inflammation you have. Some people may need more than one injection to feel relief.

Potential Benefits	Risks and Potential Complications	Alternatives
• May relieve or diagnose pain • Is less invasive than surgery, fewer risks • Allows fast recovery • Does not require a hospital stay	Different types of spinal injections carry different risks. Your doctor will explain the specific risks of your procedure. These potential risks are common to many spinal injections: • Nerve problems that cause arm or leg weakness • Increasing feelings of numbness • Briefly increased pain or severe increased pain • Incontinence • A type of post-injection headache ("spinal headache") • Bleeding, infection (rare) • Stroke • Spinal cord injury	Spinal injections are used after patients have experienced pain for several months and have already tried other approaches, such as: • Ice • Oral pain medicine • Physical therapy • Watching and waiting If the spinal injection does not help, your doctor may recommend surgery.

How do I prepare for my injection?

These are things you can do to make your procedure go better:

- **Bring any x-ray films, MRIs, or CT scans** with you to your appointment.
- **Bring a list of all your current medicines.** Be sure to include everything, including over-the-counter medicines and vitamins. And tell your healthcare providers if you have allergies to any medicines. You may be asked to stop taking certain blood thinners, such as Plavix and Coumadin, before the procedure. Always check with your healthcare providers before stopping any medicines.
- **If the purpose of your injection is to diagnose, do not take your pain medicine.** Arrive at your appointment feeling your usual amount of pain. This will make it easier to tell if the injection relieved your pain.
- **Ask your healthcare providers about food and drink.** You may be asked not to eat or drink anything for 4 to 8 hours before the procedure.
- **Tell your healthcare providers if you are ill or pregnant.** If you have a cold, flu, or other illness the day of the procedure, or if there is any chance you may be pregnant, be sure to tell your healthcare providers.
- **Wear loose clothing.** Wear clothing that won't rub against the site of the injection.

What happens during the procedure?

The actual injection takes only a few minutes, but plan on 30 to 60 minutes for the whole procedure. You will remain awake and able to communicate the entire time. Your procedure will include:

- **Monitoring.** You may have devices attached to you to check your heart rate and breathing.
- **Sedative.** You may be given a sedative to help you relax.
- **Position.** You may lie face down, face up, or on your side.
- **Local anesthetic.** You'll be given a local anesthetic near the injection site to numb the skin. This usually feels like a pinprick with some burning and only lasts a second.
- **Fluoroscopic x-ray guidance.** The doctor may inject a contrast dye that helps identify specific parts of your spine and confirm correct needle placement.
- **Injection.** Numbing medicines or anti-inflammatory medicines (steroids) will be injected into your spine.

What happens after the procedure?

After the procedure, you may stay in a recovery area and have your vital signs (heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate) monitored. You should be able to walk immediately after the procedure, although some patients experience leg weakness, numbness, or tingling for a few hours. You may be asked to fill out some paperwork before leaving.

Going home

These are things to be aware of as you're recovering at home:

- **Driving.** Someone may need to drive you home after the procedure. Your doctor will likely allow you to resume driving the next day.
- **Possible side effects.** You may experience briefly increased pain, headaches, or trouble sleeping. These should go away in the first few days.
- **Food and drink.** You may be asked not to eat or drink for a few hours.
- **Activity.** You may be asked to take it easy on the day of the injection. But it may help to get up and move around every hour or so. You should be able to resume normal activity the next day. Walk around if you feel up to it, but avoid activities that may strain your back.
- **Showering and bathing.** You can take a shower, but avoid baths or pools for 48 hours.
- **Returning to work.** Ask your doctor when you can return to work.
- **Follow up.** Be SURE to follow up with your doctor in 2 weeks or as otherwise instructed.

When to call the doctor

Call your doctor if you experience the following:

- Severe pain or headache
- Fever or chills
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Redness or swelling around the injection site
- Weakness or numbness

My doctor's contact Information:

Questions for my doctor:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Intermountain Healthcare complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. Se proveen servicios de interpretación gratis. Hable con un empleado para solicitarlo. 我們將根據您的需求提供免費的口譯服務。請找尋工作人員協助