Getting Ready for a Spinal Injection

For Steroid Injections and Myelograms

What is a spinal injection?

A spinal injection is a shot in or near the spine. You may receive steroid medicine (to reduce inflammation) and/or contrast fluid (dye that makes the area show up more clearly on X-rays).

☐ An **epidural steroid injection** is a shot of steroid medicine into the space around the spine. It may reduce inflammation near the nerve root or spinal cord. This can reduce pain in the arm or leg.

☐ A **nerve root injection** is a shot of steroid medicine into the nerve near the spine. It may reduce inflammation near the nerve root or spinal cord. This can reduce pain in the arm or leg.

☐ A **facet joint injection** is a shot of steroid medicine into one of the small joints at the back of the spine. Injury or arthritis may inflame these joints, causing pain when you bend or twist. The steroid may reduce this pain and inflammation.

☐ A **myelogram** is an X-ray exam of the spinal cord and the nerves around the spine. You will receive a shot of contrast fluid near the spine (most likely in the lower back).

How do I prepare?

For nerve root injection, please send or bring copies of any MRIs or other scans you have had.

Bring a list of your current medicines to your exam. (Include vitamins, minerals and over-the-counter medicines.) Leave your valuables at home.

Plan to have someone drive you home afterward.

**Medicines**

Stop taking the following medicines (but talk to your doctor first):

☐ If you take blood thinners, you may need to stop taking them a few days before treatment. Talk to your doctor before stopping these medicines.

☐ Stop taking Coumadin (warfarin) 3 days before treatment. Restart the day after treatment.

☐ Stop taking Coumadin (warfarin) 5 days before treatment. Restart the day after treatment.

☐ If you take Plavix, Ticlid, Pletal or Persantine, please ask your doctor if you should stop these medicines. You may need extra tests on the morning of your scan.

☐ **Myelograms only:** Stop taking medicine for depression or other mental health concerns 24 hours before your exam, if your doctor says it is safe to do so.

You may take your other medicines as normal.

**Eating and drinking**

Stop all food and drink (including water) 3 hours before your test or treatment.

☐ **Myelograms only:** Drink at least four to six glasses of water the night before your exam.
When you arrive

Injectors take about 30 to 45 minutes. Most people spend up to 2 hours in the clinic or hospital.

Please tell the doctor:

• If you are allergic to X-ray dye (contrast fluid).
• If you may be pregnant.

What happens during the injection?

• You will lie on your stomach.
• The doctor will cleanse your back. He or she will then inject medicine to numb the area. You may feel slight burning as the area gets numb.
• The doctor will insert a needle near the spine. You may feel some pressure and a little pain as the needle goes in.
• We use X-rays to make sure the needle is in the right place. (To improve the X-rays, you may receive a small amount of contrast fluid through the needle. Contrast is not used for nerve injections.)
• If you will receive a steroid: The medicine will flow through the needle and into the area around your spine. You may receive numbing medicine as well.
• If you will have a myelogram:
  – The X-ray table will slowly tilt as more X-rays are taken. This allows the contrast to travel to different parts of the spine.
  – After the X-rays, you will go to another room to have a CT scan (computed tomography). This creates more detailed pictures of the spine. A CT scan takes about 30 minutes.

What happens afterward?

We may ask you to lie down for a short time before you go home. If you had a nerve injection and your arm or leg feels numb, you will stay up to two hours until the numbness wears off. You may return to your normal activities the next day.

The muscles in your back may feel sore. A heating pad or hot water bottle may help relieve your pain. If you have a headache, it should go away over the next couple of days. Drink extra fluids, and lie flat to rest. Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen may also help.

If you received a steroid:

• It may take up to 10 days to have an effect. (If there is no change within 10 days, then a steroid won’t work for you.)
• You may notice the most pain relief within three to six weeks. Pain relief often lasts three to six months.
• For some people, the pain goes away after only one shot. It may or may not return. Other people need up to three shots to get pain relief.

Is it safe?

There is a small risk of infection or allergic reaction from the shot. You may discuss any concerns you have with your radiologist (X-ray doctor).

When will I know the results?

If you had a myelogram, your family doctor (or the doctor who ordered the test) will give you the results at your next visit.

You or your insurer will receive two bills: one from the hospital and one from the radiologist (X-ray doctor).

Who should I call with questions?

Please call your Diagnostic Imaging Department.