# Cervical, Thoracic, and Lumbar Medial Branch Blocks

Medial branch nerves are the tiny nerve branches that communicate pain caused by the facet joints in the spine. Blocking these medial branch nerves with an anesthetic temporarily stops the transmission of pain signals from the joints to the brain, providing valuable insight into the source of your pain and helping your doctor develop a plan for long-term relief.

## Understanding Medial Branch Nerves

The medial branch nerves branch off from the spinal nerves and supply sensation to the facet joints in your spine. The facet joints are small joints that connect the vertebrae in your spine and allow for movement.

Each spinal nerve splits into several branches, including the medial branch nerves. These nerves supply sensation to the facet joints, including the joint capsule, ligaments, and some small muscles around the spine. They do not control any muscles or sensations in your arms or legs.

When the facet joints are irritated or inflamed due to conditions like arthritis, injury, or overuse, the medial branch nerves transmit pain signals to the brain. This pain is often felt in the back and can be dull or achy.

Understanding how medial branch nerves work is crucial for diagnosing the source of back pain. Medial branch blocks can help pinpoint if the facet joints are the culprit. If the block relieves your pain, it suggests that the inflammation or irritation in the facet joints is causing your back pain.

## Benefits of Medial Branch Blocks

Medial branch blocks contain an anesthetic delivered around the medial branch nerve. The anesthetic numbs the nerves that innervate each joint and can, therefore, help diagnose whether the facet joint is the cause of pain.

Medial branch blocks offer several benefits, particularly for those experiencing chronic back pain:

- **Locating Pain Source:** By numbing the medial branch nerves, our physicians can see if the pain in your facet joints subsides. If you experience pain relief, it strongly suggests the facet joints are the source of your discomfort.
- **Targeted Treatment:** This pinpointed diagnosis allows our team to develop a more targeted treatment plan for your specific pain source.
- **Short-Term Pain Relief:** The injected anesthetic provides temporary pain relief for weeks or even months, significantly improving your quality of life and ability to participate in physical therapy or other pain management approaches.
- **Improved Mobility:** Reduced pain allows for better mobility, aiding in natural healing and pain reduction.
- **Minimally Invasive:** Medial branch blocks are a minimally invasive procedure with a short recovery time, translating to less risk and discomfort than major surgeries.
- **Outpatient Procedure:** The block can often be performed right in one of our five offices, eliminating the need for hospitalization.

## Pre-Op Instructions

- You will be scheduled at one of our convenient locations, listed below, where you will be for approximately 1-1.5 hours total.
- You will be required to have a responsible adult drive you home.
- You should take your routine medications (i.e., blood pressure and diabetic medications) on the day of your procedure.
- If you are taking a blood thinner and have a cervical procedure, please notify the office immediately.
- You must not eat any food six hours before your appointment.
- You may have sips of clear liquids up to two hours before your appointment.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing to your appointment.
- It is important that you have a high enough level of pain prior to the procedure to see if it is effective; therefore, refrain from taking any medications that lessen your pain before the procedure.

## The Medial Branch Block Procedure

- You will lie face down on a procedure table.
- The physician will use fluoroscopic (X-ray) guidance to visualize the area where the medial branch nerve lies.
- The physician will scrub your skin with sterile soap, place a drape on your back, and direct a tiny needle using fluoroscopic guidance towards the medial branch nerve.
- The physician will inject a small amount of contrast (dye) to ensure proper needle position and then a small amount of anesthetic medication to block the medial branch nerve.

## Post-Procedure Expectations

Immediately after the procedure, you will go to a recovery area and be asked to rate your pain on a scale. You may be asked to move around and try to imitate something that usually brings about your typical pain. You may receive a pain log to rate your pain relief for the next several hours after the procedure. The physician will use this information to plan for your further care. Of note, depending on the area treated, the arm(s), chest wall, or legs(s) may feel weak or numb for up to several hours after the procedure.

You may return to your normal activities the day after your procedure, including returning to work.

### Location of Procedures

| Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Phoenix Office | Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Mesa Office | Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Scottsdale Office | Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Peoria Office | Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Gilbert Office |
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| 3700 N. 24th Street, Suite 210<br>Phoenix, AZ 85016 | 6634 E. Baseline Rd., Suite 101<br>Mesa, AZ 85206 | 8670 E. Shea Blvd., Suite 102<br>Scottsdale, AZ 85260 | 13128 N. 94th Drive, Suite 200<br>Peoria, AZ 85381 | 3615 S. Rome St.<br>Gilbert, AZ 85297 |

**If you need to reschedule your appointment, please give 24 hours notice and call 602-840-0681.**