

## Do You Have New or Worsening Back or Neck Pain? Spinal Injections May Offer Relief

by Thomas R. Saullo, MD

**B**ack and neck problems are a very common medical issue for people of all ages. Even with proper treatment, many people continue to have pain, which sometimes radiates into their legs or arms. Often, these patients are not aware of an advanced pain-relieving procedure that may help them – a fluoroscopy-guided spinal injection, specifically targeting the source of the discomfort.



### Advanced treatment options

When over-the-counter treatments and other physician-prescribed care do not provide adequate improvement, your doctor may suggest a spinal injection. Some injections are used to help diagnose your condition, while others aim to reduce pain, decrease reliance on oral medications, and allow for increased daily function.

### When to see a doctor for your pain

If your back or neck pain lasts more than a few weeks or interferes with your daily activities, a physician should evaluate you and perform a thorough physical exam. Diagnostic x-rays, or more advanced tests such as MRI or CT scans, may be needed in some cases to help clarify the cause of your problem. Often, a physician specializing in spinal disorders is needed to establish a diagnosis.

Even after a careful examination, the cause of persistent spinal pain is not always clear. The spine is very complex and can be difficult to treat. Common treatments include patient education, oral medications, physical therapy, chiropractic care, and allowing adequate time for recovery. If your symptoms worsen or persist even after proper diagnosis and treatment, more aggressive treatment may be considered.

Back and neck pain is sometimes caused by a joint problem, by irritated nerves, or by intervertebral discs. Injections can be targeted to help pain from:

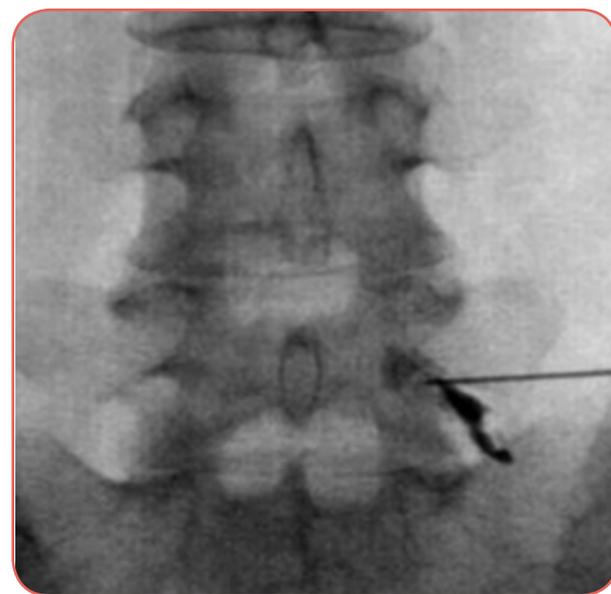
- Joints in the spine, called facet joints; the sacroiliac joints in the pelvis; and the hip joints.
- Sciatica, which develops when spinal nerves send pain into the legs.
- Damaged intervertebral discs, which are another common source of episodic pain.

### Why are these injections different?

In years past, injections usually were performed without the aid of live imaging. As a result, the injection frequently did not reach its intended target and therefore the patient did not get relief from pain.

Modern spinal injections utilize live x-ray guidance, called fluoroscopy, allowing the physician to safely and accurately target the nerve root, spinal level or specific joint to be treated.

Only physicians with specialized advanced training should perform spinal injections. Injections performed without x-ray guidance are not recommended.



*This fluoroscopic view of the spine shows contrast dye being injected around a spinal nerve root and into the epidural space of the lower back. The dye helps verify that the pain-relieving injection will cover the intended area.*

### What is in the injection?

These injections usually include:

- a small amount of contrast dye. This helps to verify that the injection will cover the intended area.
- a local anesthetic, such as lidocaine. The anesthetic helps to identify the source of the pain if the patient experiences numbness at the structure that usually generates pain.
- a steroid, such as dexamethasone. The steroid is a potent anti-inflammatory medication with pain-blocking properties.

Receiving an injection of this type can provide greater pain relief than taking medication by mouth, because it allows for direct and concentrated application of the medication right at the source of pain.

### For more information

If you would like to have your back or neck evaluated, call our office at **336-333-6306** or visit our website at **www.TriadSpine.com** to make an appointment for a consultation.

*When You're in Pain...*

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Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS • Thomas R. Saullo, MD • Ruben Torrealba, MD

2105 Braxton Lane, Suite 101 • Greensboro, NC 27408  
4590 Premier Drive • High Point, NC 27265

*Thomas R. Saullo, MD, is a board-certified specialist in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Spine & Scoliosis Specialists, the Triad's only medical practice dedicated exclusively to spine care. As a fellowship-trained interventional spine care specialist, he performs minimally invasive procedures aimed at decreasing pain and increasing function for patients.*