

Facet joint injections for people with persistent non-specific low back pain (Facet Injection Study): a feasibility study for a randomised controlled trial

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Injections of drugs into joints in the back is a treatment option for some people with low back pain (LBP). We do not know how well these work. Before a large-scale randomised controlled trial could be carried out, there was a need to explore if a trial is possible.

At a gathering of health professionals, pain experts, academics and lay people, agreement was reached on how to diagnose possible facet joint pain, how and what to inject into the joints and what the best physiotherapy treatment was. Here we ran a feasibility trial exploring if it is possible to run a larger trial to test if the addition of injections into the back to a custom-made physiotherapy treatment reduces LBP.

Patients who had suspected facet joint pain from five NHS pain services were invited to take part. They received a first physiotherapist session. At the end of this, they were randomly allocated to receive either an injection and five additional physiotherapy sessions or only the five additional sessions. We aimed to recruit 150 people in total over a 6-month recruitment period. During the study we examined all of the trial processes, for example exploring the recruitment of participants, and monitored patients' pathways through the trial. We also carried out interviews with study staff and patients to explore their experiences of the study.

Recruitment was very difficult, and only 26 people had been recruited when the trial was terminated by the funder. We understand why there were difficulties in recruitment and we were also able to identify that, once patients were recruited, there were no problems with patient care. We cannot make any suggestions about the effects of the interventions. Overall, pain was reduced and the interventions were inexpensive in terms of costs to the NHS.

With slight changes, it would be feasible to deliver a larger trial exploring the use of these injections.

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