

## Facet Joint Injections

### What causes facet joint pain?

Facet joints are common sources of chronic back and neck pain. Each vertebral body in your spine has 3 main points of movement: the intervertebral disc and the two facet joints. These facet joints are small, stabilizing joints located on either side of each vertebra and consist of bony knobs coated with smooth cartilage. As a disc thins with aging and from daily wear and tear, the space between the two spinal vertebrae shrinks, eroding the cartilage and causing painful friction. Trauma, fractures, torn ligaments, disc problem, and nearby spine fusion all can cause abnormal movement and alignment, putting extra stress on the facet joints.

### What are the symptoms?

Facet joint pain can occur in any area of your spine. Most often it affects the lower back and neck. Symptoms can include:

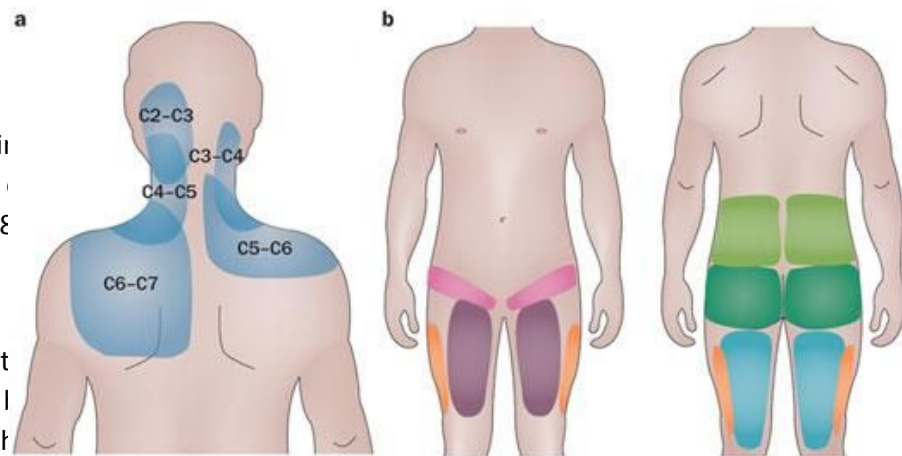
- Pain or tenderness in the area
- Pain that increases with twisting at the waist or bending backwards
- Pain that moves to the buttocks and hips or the back of the thighs
- Stiffness or difficulty with certain movement, such as standing up straight or getting out of a chair
- Difficulty turning the head
- Shoulder pain
- Headaches

### How is it diagnosed?

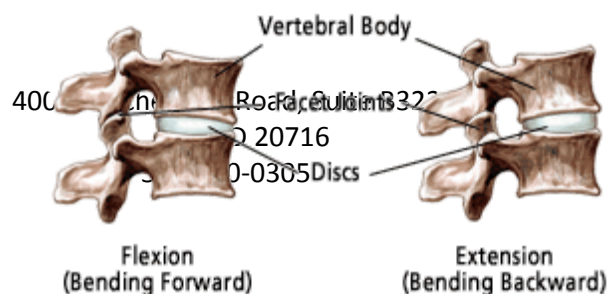
The most definitive diagnosis for determining if facet joint pain is the cause of your back pain involves injecting a numbing medicine into the joint. If there is a significant decrease in pain ( $\geq 50\%$ ), then the facet joint is likely the source of the pain.

### Treatment options

Facet joint problems are usually treated with medication, exercise and physical therapy. If these methods do not improve your pain, you may be a candidate for a minimally invasive surgical procedure called a microdiscectomy, or rhizotomy.



### Facet Joints in Motion



**Cervical (a) and Lumbar (b) distributions of facet pain**

### What is a facet joint injection (medial branch block)?

The injections are performed to decrease inflammation and pain in the facet joint. Before the injection is given, a local skin anesthetic is used to numb the area. The injection is performed under fluoroscopic (x-ray) guidance to ensure accurate and safe localization of the medication. The procedure takes around 15 minutes and then the patient is in observed recovery for several minutes afterward.

### What are the expected results?

Relief due to the anesthetic is often felt immediately but the effects may be temporary. You may have sore back for 1-2 days due to the needle insertion. Pain relief from the steroid medications will typically occur during the first week after the injection.

### Will my activities be decreased?

We advise you do not drive for at least 12 hours after the procedure. If sedation is used, you are not to drive or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours after the procedure. By the next days, normal activities may be resumed at a tolerable level.

### What are the risks and/or side effects?

Side effects and adverse reactions are rare. The most common side effect is temporary discomfort. The medication used has been known to cause fluid retention, weight gain, elevated blood pressure, mood swings, irritability, insomnia, and an increase in blood sugar for diabetics. Other rare side effects or risks include but are not limited to worsening of the pain, bleeding, infection, seizure, or death. Serious side effects and complications are uncommon.

