

Facet Radiofrequency

What causes facet joint pain?

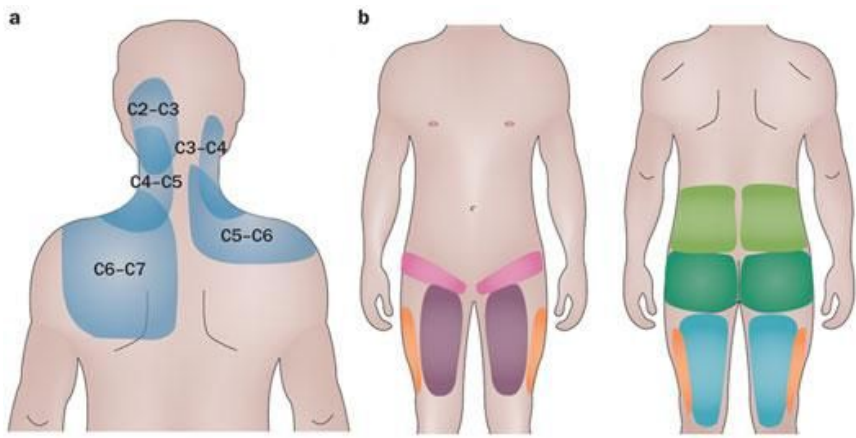
Facet joints are common sources of chronic back and neck pain. Each vertebral body in your spine has 3 main points of movement: the intervertebral disc and the two facet joints. These facet joints are small, stabilizing joints located on either side of each vertebra and consist of bony knobs coated with slippery 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

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



by a **medial branch block**. This is a procedure where a numbing agent is injected into the nerves that supply the facet joints. If there is a significant decrease in pain ($\geq 50-80\%$), it confirms that the joint is causing the pain.

Treatment options

Facet joint problems are usually treated with a combination of conservative methods, including pain medication, exercise and physical therapy, back braces, and steroid injections. If your pain does not improve, you may be helped by a procedure called radiofrequency neurotomy, or rhizotomy.

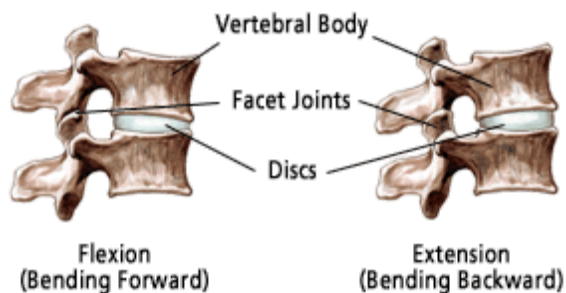
About Radiofrequency Neurotomy

This approach involves applying heat to certain nerve pathways to “shut off” the transmission of pain signals to the brain. Multiple clinical studies show that this procedure significantly reduces pain severity and frequency for 6 months to 1-2 years in majority of patients.

Procedure Benefits

- Pain relief for up to 2 years
- Significant, longer lasting pain relief compared to steroid injections
- Appreciable pain relief compared to surgery
- Low complication and morbidity rates
- Greater range of motion
- Improved quality of life
- Short recovery time

Facet Joints in Motion



What You Can Expect with Radiofrequency Neurotomy

Before Your Procedure

Your doctor may confirm your diagnosis by making a nerve block.

During Your Procedure

Radiofrequency can be performed while you are under sedation. To begin, the area to be treated is numbed. With (x-ray) guidance, your doctor will insert a needle into the disc space, confirming correct placement, a high-frequency electrode is inserted, heating up and lesioning the nerve.

After Your Procedure

Typically patients go home within 1 hour. You may be sore after the procedure, but most patients are able to walk within 24 to 48 hours.

After a few days, you should notice a decrease in pain. In several weeks, you can expect pain relief lasting up to 6 months. Your pain may return, but the procedure may be repeated.

