

Facet Joint Treatment

What is facet pain?

- Facet joints are small joints on the left and right side of your spine. They help keep your spine stable.
- These joints can be hurt or develop arthritis and cause low back or neck pain. This pain is also called low back or neck arthritis, low back or neck degenerative joints, or Facet syndrome.

How is facet pain diagnosed?

- There are tests to diagnose facet joint pain.
- Your doctor will go over your spine history and do a physical exam as well as imaging tests to decide if this may be the cause of your low back or neck pain.

What treatments may help my low back or neck pain caused by facet joints?

The goal of treatment is to improve your ability to perform your daily activities. If you can manage your pain and perform your daily functions you do not need to treat facet pain.

- Injections may help your symptoms, but most people with low back or neck pain do not need injections.
- There are no surgical treatments for facet pain unless your spine becomes less stable and needs to be fused.



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Here are common treatments you can use to help your back or neck pain, with or without an injection:

- **Physical therapy and exercise.** Gentle exercises have been proven to help arthritis pain. Activities such as walking, water exercises, stationary bike riding and yoga are all examples of gentle exercise you can try. A physical therapist or spine specialist can help choose the best exercise for you.
- **Manipulation.** During manipulation, a doctor or physical therapist will use his/her hands to decrease pain and improve motion of your spine.
- **Medicines.** Most medicines for arthritis like acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil), naproxen (Aleve) can be helpful. Please talk with your doctor before starting medicines.
- **Heat.** Hot baths, microwaveable heating pads and heat wraps can help with the muscle tension that comes with low back or neck arthritis pain.

What kinds of injections may help my low back or neck pain?

There are two types of injections for low back or neck pain, lumbar or cervical facet joint steroid injections (steroid shots) and lumbar or cervical rhizotomy (nerve blocks).

- **Steroid shots:** Your doctor will use an x-ray machine to guide anti-inflammatory steroid and numbing medicine into your joint.
- **Nerve blocks and Rhizotomy:** This can be a two-step process.
 1. Your doctor will perform a test to find the right facet joint(s) by injecting numbing medicine near the nerves they are connected to. If your doctor is able to find the joints that are causing your pain, you will come back for a second visit.
 2. During the second visit, your doctor will use heat from a radiowave probe to block the nerve pain.

Steroid Shots

What is usually involved?

- Your doctor uses an X-ray machine to guide the injection.
- You lie on your stomach while a small needle is inserted into the facet joint(s) of your back or neck.
- The procedure takes 10-15 minutes.
- You will be monitored for another 20 minutes and then can return home.
- You may return to normal activities the next day.



What are the benefits?

- Exact benefits of steroid shots are debated by doctors. Some studies show benefits that last and others show only short term relief.
- About one out of three people get three months or more relief. Another one out of three may get three months or less of relief.
- You can use this time to advance your home wellness program.
- If it helps, steroid shots can potentially be repeated.
- You will still have the option of using other non-surgical treatments.

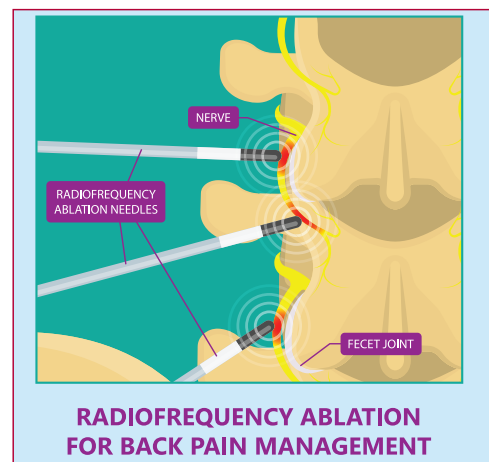
What are the risks and side effects?

- The shots may not work.
- Rare complications could be: more pain, infection or an allergic reaction to the shot.
- Please note that not all insurances will cover this procedure.

Rhizotomy

What is usually involved?

- Rhizotomy is a two-step process.
- **Step 1** starts with a test injection of a small amount of local anesthetic to block signals from the joint(s) in your back or neck. This is called a Medial Branch Block.
- If you receive significant temporary relief from the test injection and can perform activities that are usually too painful right after the procedure, then you may be a candidate for **Step 2**, the rhizotomy. We will not do other testing on the area if **Step 1** was not successful.
- **Step 2** is a radiowave probe that adds heat to those nerves and hopefully blocks the pain.



What are the benefits?

- The rhizotomy procedure uses radiofrequency waves (heat) to damage small nerves that come from the joint(s). This blocks the pain signals.
- Rhizotomy works in about 6 out of 10 people who show benefits from **Step 1**.
- If successful, pain relief may last 6 months or more.
- The procedure can be repeated if pain comes back.

What are the risks and side effects?

- The shots may not work.
- Rare complications could be: more pain, infection or an allergic reaction to the shot.
- It is not known whether blocking feeling from the joint can hurt the joint over time.