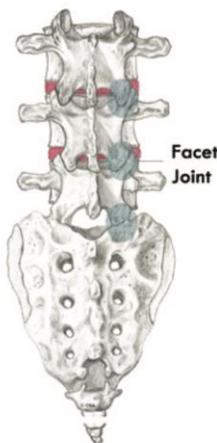


Lumbar Facet Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA)

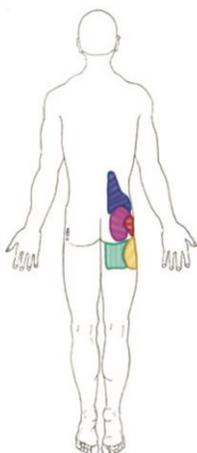
For Low Back Pain

A lumbar facet RFA is an outpatient procedure for treating low back pain. This information sheet will explain what it is.



What are lumbar facet joints?

Facet joints connect the vertebrae, the bones of the spine. They help guide your spine when you move. The low back area of the spine is called the lumbar region. It contains five vertebrae. Facet joints are found on both sides of the spine. Each is about the size of a thumbnail. Lumbar facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. The right L4-5 facet joint, for example, joins the 4th and 5th lumbar vertebrae on the right side. Medial branch nerves are found near facet joints. They communicate pain from the facet joint. They tell the brain when facet joints have been injured.



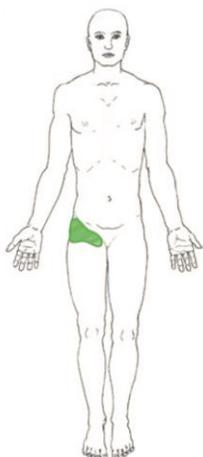
What is lumbar facet joint pain?

You may feel pain if a lumbar facet joint is injured. Sometimes it feels like muscle tension. Other times it can be severe pain. The cartilage inside the joint may be injured. Other times only connecting ligaments surrounding the joint are injured. Facet pain also depends on which joint is affected. Lumbar facet joint pain can occur in an area from your low back down to your buttocks, groin and hips. The diagram shows areas of pain that are usually associated with lumbar facet injuries.

Based on Fuku S, Okawa K, Sakurai H, Ohno K, Kawanishi H, Higashimura Y. Distribution of referred pain from the lumbar intervertebral joint and dorsal root. The Clinical Journal of Pain. 1997; 13: 303-307.

How do I know if I have lumbar facet pain?

If you have pain in one or more of these areas, you may have lumbar facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRIs sometimes show if a facet joint is causing pain but not always.

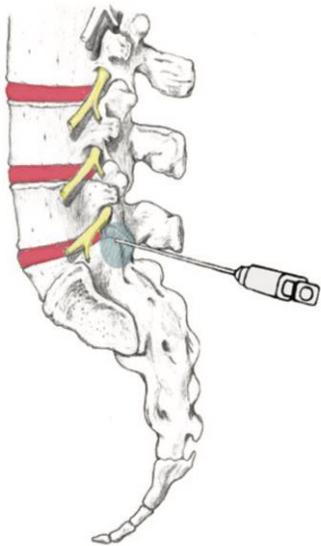


What is a lumbar facet RFA?

RFA uses radiofrequency energy to disrupt nerve function. When this is done to a lumbar medial branch nerve, the nerve can no longer transmit pain from an injured facet joint.

What happens during an injection?

A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a small thin needle near the facet joint. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, must be used to position the needle. The doctor will



then check to make sure it is at the correct nerve by stimulating it. This may cause muscle twitching and provoke some of your pain. Once the needle is properly placed, the nerve will be numbed. Radiofrequency energy will then be used to disrupt the medial branch nerve. This is often repeated at more than one level of the spine.

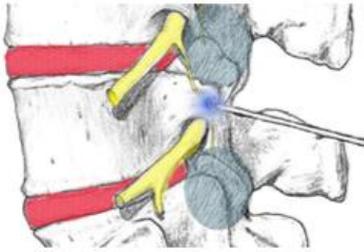
You may choose to do this procedure with sedation administered by an anesthesiologist or awake under local anesthesia.

What happens after an injection?

You will be monitored for up to 30 minutes after the injection. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions. It is recommended that you keep a pain diary. It is important to do this because it helps your doctor know how the injection is working.

Take it easy for the rest of the day.

You may feel sore for one to four days. It may be due to muscle and nerve irritation. Your back may feel numb, weak, or itchy for a couple weeks. Maximum pain relief normally comes in two to three weeks.



How long can I expect pain relief?

Nerves regenerate after an RFA, but how long this takes varies. Your pain may or may not return when the nerves regenerate. If it does, another RFA can be done.