

Facet Joint Injections

At times, a medial branch block is tried after the patient has already been treated with one or more facet joint injections, although this is not always the case.

2. Facet joint injections involve an injection of anti-inflammatory steroid solution directly into the joint. If such an injection confirms the facet joint as the likely source of the patient's pain, but this injection - along with other treatments (such as physical therapy, manual manipulation, and medications) have not resulted in long term pain relief, then a medial branch block may be recommended.
3. As evidence evolves on the efficacy of facet joint injections, a medial branch block may also be considered *instead of* a facet joint injection. A medial branch block might also be considered first if for any reason the patient cannot tolerate the steroid and/or an injection directly into the facet joint.

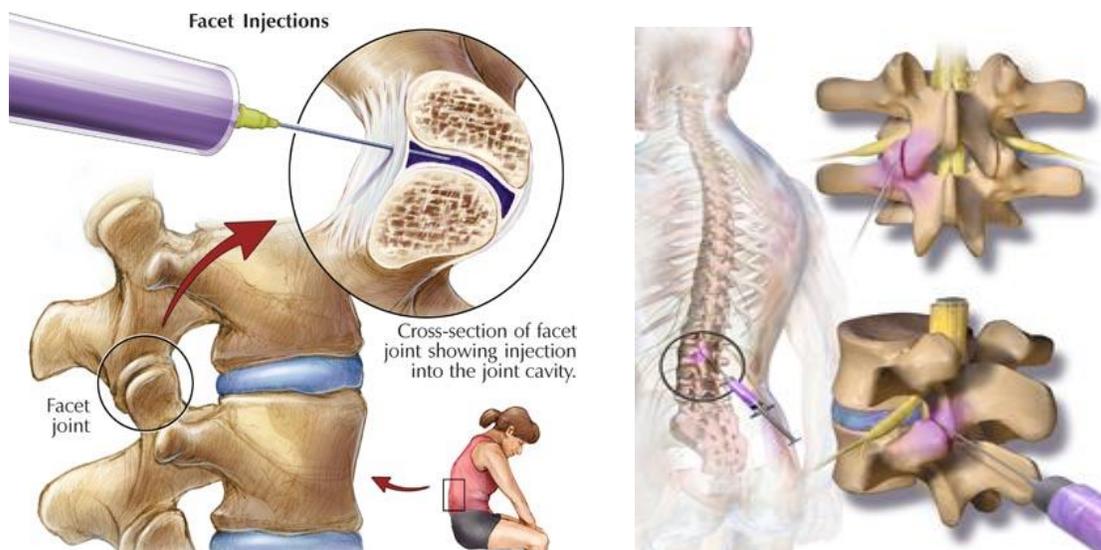
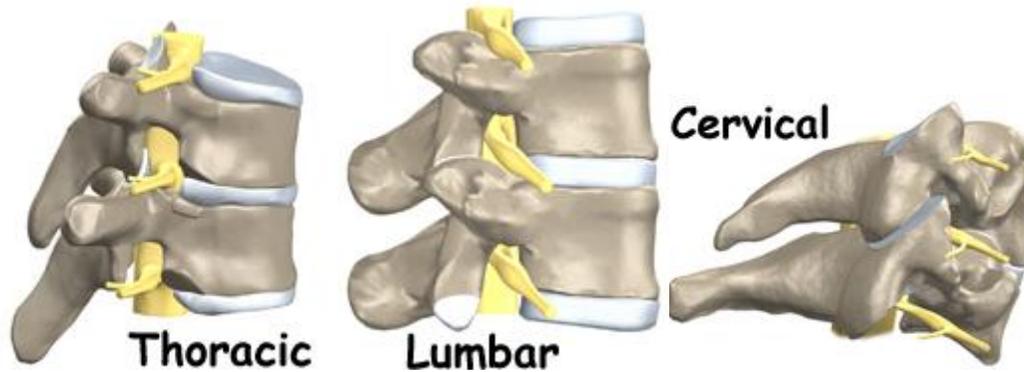


Figure 1 Facet Joint Injection



Thoracic, Lumbar and Cervical Facet Joint Injections

Facet joints are small joints at each segment of the spine that provide stability and help guide motion. The facet joints can become painful due to arthritis of the spine, a back injury, or mechanical stress to the back.

A cervical, thoracic or lumbar facet joint injection involves injecting a small amount of local anesthetic (numbing agent) and/or steroid medication, which can anesthetize the facet joints and block the pain. The pain relief from a facet joint injection is intended to help a patient better tolerate a physical therapy routine to rehabilitate his or her injury or back condition.

Facet joint injections usually have two goals: to help diagnose the cause and location of pain and also to provide pain relief:

- *Diagnostic goals:* By placing numbing medicine into the facet joint, the amount of immediate pain relief experienced by the patient will help determine if the facet joint is a source of pain. If complete pain relief is achieved while the facet joint is numb, it means that joint is likely a source of pain.
- *Pain relief goals:* Along with the numbing medication, a facet joint injection also includes injecting time-release steroid (cortisone) into the facet joint to reduce inflammation, which can sometimes provide longer-term pain relief.

The injection procedure may also be called a **facet block**, as its purpose is to block the pain.

Facet Joint Anatomy

The facet joints are paired joints in the back and neck, one pair at each vertebral level (one joint on each side of the vertebrae). These joints have opposing surfaces of cartilage (cushioning tissue

between the bones) and a surrounding capsule that is filled with synovial fluid, which reduces the friction between bones that rub together.

