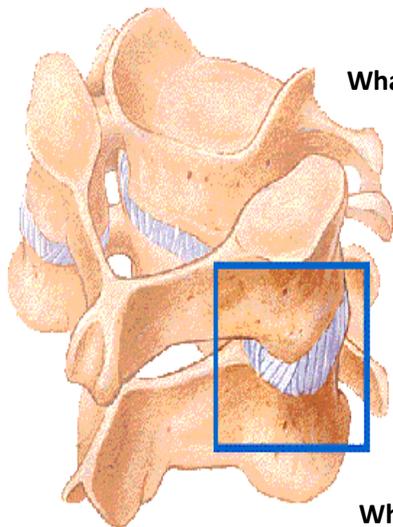


LUMBAR FACET JOINT



What is a facet joint - The facet joints are small stabilising joints located between adjacent vertebrae. Their role is to control the movement needed to turn, look around, bend forwards and backwards.

Why do facet joints become painful? - The sliding surfaces of the facet joints are covered by a low friction, moist cartilage. When facet joints become worn or torn the cartilage may become thin or disappear. This can cause the joints to become inflamed. When this occurs, a protective reflex may arise which causes the muscles which run either side of the spine to spasm.

Mechanism of injury - Most commonly associated with general wear and tear due to aging but traumatic injury can also cause this problem along with poor posture. It is also common in those who perform repeated lifting above the head or prolonged standing.

What are the symptoms of a facet joint lesion? - You may experience pain in the back as the muscles which run parallel to the spine can spasm. The symptoms may also radiate into the buttocks or legs. Typically, leaning backwards is more painful than leaning forwards and mobility will be limited.

What treatments are most commonly used?

Massage - encompassing a variety of techniques and is given with sufficient pressure through the superficial tissue to reach the deep lying structures. It is used to increase blood flow, decrease swelling, reduce muscle spasm and promote normal tissue repair.

Mobilisation - is a manual technique where the joint and soft tissues are gently moved by the therapist to restore normal range, lubricate joint surfaces, and relieve pain.

Manipulation - is a high speed, short movement thrust given at the end of available range. It is used to break down adhesions, remove a blockage within a joint and restore full painless movement. A click or noise may be experienced during this treatment

Ultrasonic therapy - transmits sound waves through the tissues stimulating the body's chemical reactions and therefore healing process, just as shaking a test tube in the laboratory speeds up a chemical reaction.

Interferential therapy - introduces a small electrical current into the tissues and can be used at varying frequencies for differing treatment effects. E.g. pain relief, muscle or nerve stimulation, promoting blood flow and reducing inflammation.

Other treatments that could be used - Acupuncture - an oriental technique of introducing needles into the skin to increase or decrease energy flow to promote pain relief and healing.

What can you do to help your condition?

Medication - Ask your GP or Pharmacist for advice on the best medication for your condition.

Heat packs- The application of a hot pack may be beneficial in helping the muscles to relax, promote blood flow to the area and provide pain relief

Posture - good posture enables the muscles of the spine to act as a supporting structure and decreases the strain on the joints of the spine.

Ergonomics - ensure that all your seating is encouraging you to attain good posture and your mattress is supporting your spine adequately.

What if the treatment does not help or resolve my condition? - It is very rare that therapy does not give great benefit, in these cases a cortisone or epidural injection may be appropriate and in very extreme cases surgery is a possible option. These options can be discussed with your therapist if appropriate.