

# Facet Joint Syndrome (Arthritis)

The facet joints are bony structures that connect the vertebrae in the spine. Each facet joint is lined with cartilage and surrounded by a lubricating capsule that enables the vertebrae to move freely.

## JOINT DAMAGE

Facet joints may become irritated and painful from pressure on the bones where the joints meet. Causes of stress to the facet joints include everyday wear and tear, previous back or neck injuries and intervertebral disc degeneration.

## CARTILAGE LOSS

Cartilage is a protective tissue that cushions bones and allows joints to glide freely. When the facet joints are stressed, their cartilage covering wears away.

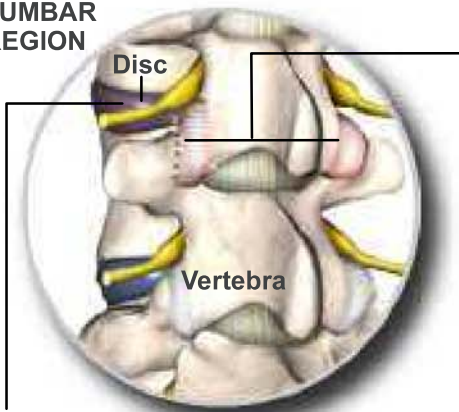
## SYMPTOMS

Pain from facet syndrome differs depending on which facet joints in the spine are damaged.

## TREATMENT

Facet joint arthritis is first treated conservatively with rest, ice, heat, anti-inflammatory medications and physical therapy. In addition, facet joint blocks may be administered not only to diagnose facet joint pain but also to treat it. If non-surgical methods fail to relieve pain, a facet rhizotomy or bone fusion may be performed.

### LUMBAR REGION



**Facet joints**  
Each vertebra has two joints located on each side of the spine. These joints provide stability to the spine and limit excessive motion.

If a disc deteriorates, space between the vertebrae decreases and may cause friction between facet joints.

### SYMPTOMS

#### In cervical region

If the affected joints are in the neck (cervical spine), both headaches and pain in the neck, shoulders, and upper to mid back are common.

#### In lumbar region

If the affected facet joints are in the low back (lumbar spine), pain is often felt in the low back, buttocks, and back of the thigh.

