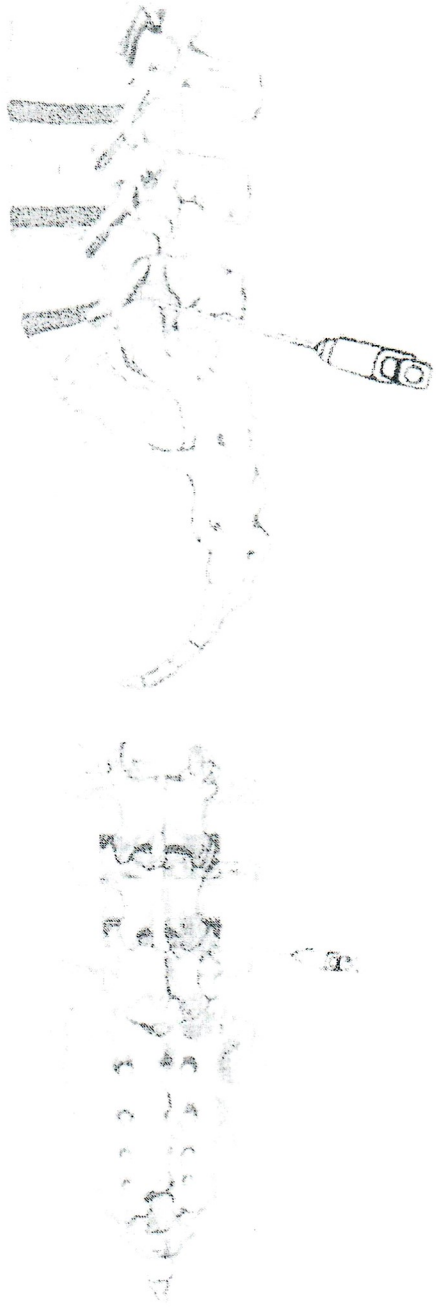
BIOHEALTH
Pain Management

Lumbar Facet Joint Block

Overview

A lumbar facet injection is an outpatient procedure for diagnosing and treating low back pain.



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.

What is 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.

What is a lumbar facet block?

In a lumbar facet injection, a local anesthetic (numbing medicine) and corticosteroid (anti-inflammatory medicine) are injected into one or more of your lumbar facet joints. The injection can be used to diagnose or treat. An anesthetic and steroid may be injected to see if they temporarily lessen your pain. If they do, and if this helps you move better, it tells the doctor which facet joint may be causing the pain. The corticosteroid is used to treat inflammation of the facet joint.

What happens after treatment?

You will be monitored for up to 15 minutes after the injection. Take it easy for the rest of the day. You may feel immediate pain relief and numbness in your back for a period of time after the injection. This tells you the medication has reached the right spot. Your pain may return after this short pain-free period, or may even be a little worse for a day or two. You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

What are the results?

The extent and duration of pain relief may depend on the amount of inflammation and how many areas are involved. Other coexisting factors may be responsible for your pain. Sometimes an injection can bring several weeks to months of pain relief, and then more treatment is needed. Other times, particularly if there is no underlying bone or joint problem, one injection brings long-term pain relief.