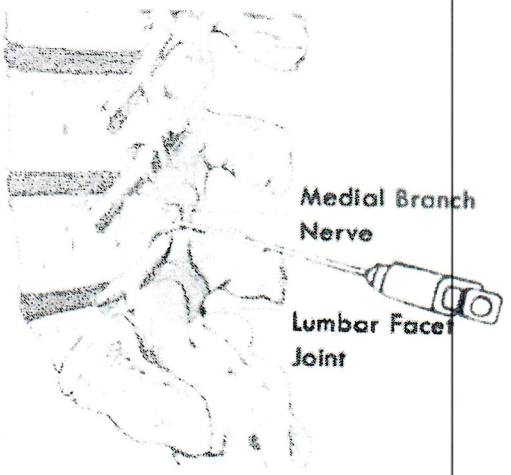
BIOHEALTH
Pain Management

Lumbar Medial Branch Block

Overview

A lumbar medial branch block is an outpatient procedure for diagnosing and treating low back pain.

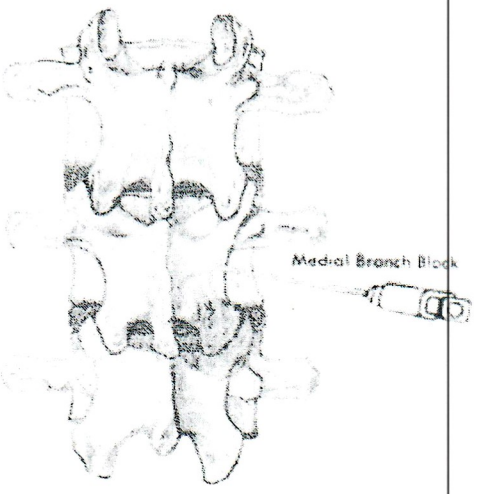


What are lumbar facet joints?

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. Medial branch nerves are found near facet joints. They transmit pain signals from the facet joints to your brain.

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 medial branch block?

In a lumbar medial branch block, an anesthetic is injected near the medial branch nerve. This stops the transmission of pain signals from the facet joint. If this reduces your pain and helps you move your back like normal, it may tell the doctor which facet joint is causing the pain.

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 limited period of time after the injection. This tells you the medication has reached the right spot. You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

What are the results?

This is a diagnostic test and the results seldom lasts more than a few hours or a couple of days, at the most. This is normal. This injection is performed as a predictor of the efficacy of radiofrequency lesioning of these medial branch nerves. If your pain goes away for a short time, but then returns, you may be a candidate for radiofrequency ablation (RFA) of the medial branch nerve. This procedure provides a more sustained disruption of pain signals and often prolonged pain relief.