



### **Facet Joint Syndrome**

**Definition:** Facet joint syndrome is an inflammation (swelling) or wearing out of the facet joints found in the lower back and neck. Facet joints are joints that attach the bones of the spine (vertebra). These joints allow movement of the spine.

**Common Terms:** Facet joint dysfunction, lumbar facet syndrome, cervical facet syndrome, back pain, neck pain.

**Typical Mechanism of Injury:** Facet joint syndrome occurs from repetitive stress to the spine because of excessive weights or movement. Aging or trauma may also cause the joints to wear down, allowing the bones to rub against each other. Poor posture, smoking, being overweight, arthritis, inflammation and infection can also cause facet joint damage.

**Common Signs and Symptoms:** Lower back symptoms include: pain or tenderness; pain that increases with twisting or arching the body; pain that moves to the buttocks or the back of the thighs; stiffness or difficulty standing up straight or getting up out of a chair. In the neck symptoms may include: neck pain; headaches; shoulder pain or pain with twisting the head.

**Common Treatment:** Surgery is usually not necessary and pain will often get better with rest, time and avoiding aggravating activities. Good posture to keep the spine in proper alignment reduces stress on the lower back and neck. Rehabilitation will help promote strength, flexibility, increased blood flow and decreased pain and inflammation. Over-the-counter pain relievers will help with pain. Sometimes prescription muscle relaxers, pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications may be needed. Cold compresses or ice can also be applied several times a day for 20 minutes at a time. As spasms get better, gentle heat applications may be used.

**Prevention:** Proper posture for activities like lifting and twisting are very important. Stopping smoking, losing weight and getting regular exercise all help reduce the risk of back and neck problems.

**Expectations:** A consistent rehabilitation program will help most people return to normal activities within several days to several weeks. Occasionally it may take longer and other treatments (such as nerve blocks) may be necessary.

## **DEPARTMENT OF ORTHOPAEDICS & SPORTS MEDICINE**

Carol & Frank Morsani Center for Advanced Health Care \* 13330 USF Laurel Dr \* Tampa, Florida  
33612 \* (813) 396-9625 \* FAX (813) 396-9195 \* [www.health.usf.edu](http://www.health.usf.edu)

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