

Cervical Facet Joint Sprain

The spine has a number of bones that are referred to as the vertebrae. Every vertebra connects to the vertebra above and below it by the facet joints on both sides of the spine. The joints are designed to support the weight of the body and provide the spine with movement.

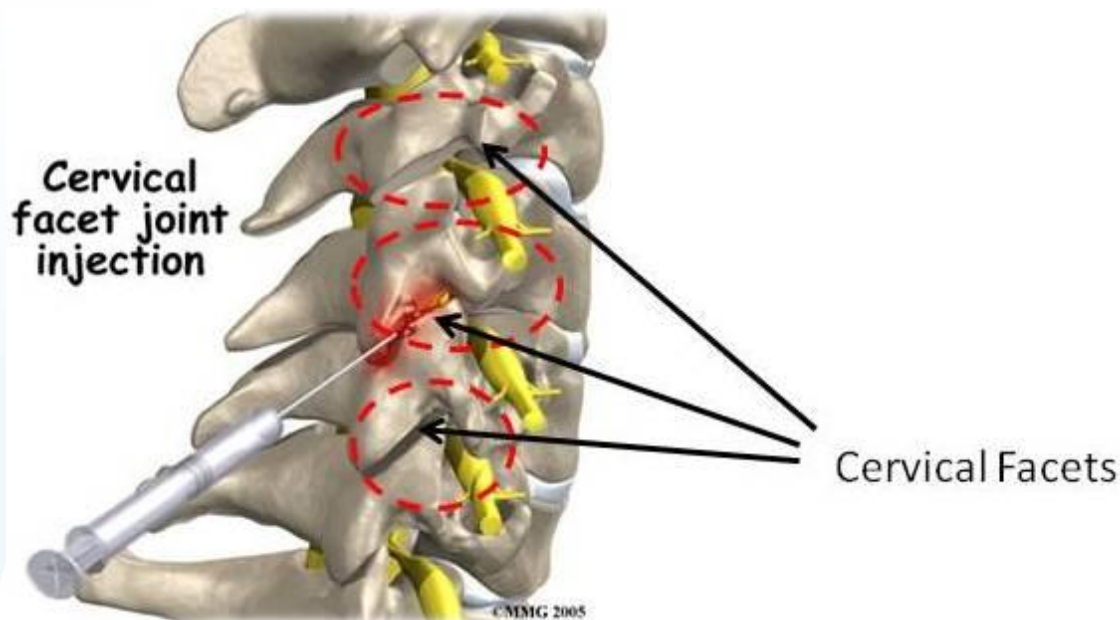
The facet joints are comprised of smooth cartilage that lies between the bony joint surfaces that cushion the impact from one bone to the other. Strong connective tissues wrap around the bony ends that provide the joint with support. During certain spinal movements, compression and stretching forces are placed on the facets. If the forces extend beyond what the joint can handle, injury will occur. It might involve a joint sprain, ligament sprain, inflammation, or in severe cases cartilage damage.

How Do I Know If I Have a Facet Joint Sprain?

Most cases of cervical facet pain is caused by sleeping awkwardly with the neck twisted. The sufferer then wakes with neck pain which worsens through the day. The pain can be excruciating and the sufferer may be unable to turn or rotate their neck. Underlying predisposing factors include stress, tight neck muscles, and hypermobility of the cervical spine. Sometimes a facet joint sprain is also known as facet joint syndrome, or facet locking. Locking implies that the facet joint has become stiff or stuck.

Cervical Facet Joint Sprain Anatomy

The facet joint is the join between two vertebrae. There are two facet joints at each level of the spine, one on the left and one on the right. These two facets articulate with the vertebrae above. Joining the vertebrae together forms the spinal column, which houses the spinal cord. From the spinal cord in the neck runs the nerves which go to the arms.



How to Treat a Cervical Facet Joint Sprain:

1. Manual or Physical Therapy

Manual treatment is one of the most successful ways to treat a cervical facet joint strain. Your therapist will use mobilization techniques to improve range of mobility to your stiff neck, and this will help reduce inflammation and pain. Soft tissue massage can also be beneficial to reduce muscle spasm.

2. Injections

Using an intra-articular injection (most often a steroid injection) to treat chronic facet pain after an injury has proven beneficial to a number of individuals. Upon having an injection, you can go a few days up to a few months without having to deal with the pain from the injured site. Everyone will respond differently to the injections, so only you can determine what the treatment will do for you. They can be hit-and-miss. So it's usually best to wait until after you have tried manual/physical therapy first to make sure this could not cure your problem.

3. Surgery

Cervical fusion or micro-discectomy is usually only considered if/when there is a slipped disc in your neck, and usually when that disc is pressing a nerve that goes into your arm. Surgery is a last case scenario, and in most cases you would have had injections or physiotherapy/osteopathy/chiropractic first to make sure this did not cure you.

Tips:

- Make sure to maintain proper posture to avoid putting undue pressure on the facet joints.
- Leading a sedentary lifestyle is one of the main reasons why people end up with injuries to their facet joints due to inactivity and weakness.
- When lifting an object, it is important that you follow the proper steps to avoid injuring yourself in the process.
- Lifestyles that involve a large amount of bending, lifting and sitting tend to weaken the muscles and joints making you more susceptible to injury.
- Maintaining a healthy weight will help your joints and muscles to stay in shape.
- Exercising regularly will help to promote muscle stability and enhance your core.