

LUMBAR RADIOFREQUENCY LESIONING

For Chronic Low Back Pain

A lumbar radiofrequency lesioning (RFL) is an outpatient procedure for low back, buttock, hip and groin pain. This information sheet will explain what it is, your doctor can explain if it is for you.

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 2-3 facet joint, for example, joins the 2nd and 3rd 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 lumbar facet 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.

Facet pain also depends on which facet joints are affected. Pain from lumbar facet joints occurs in an area from your low back down to your buttocks, groin and hips.

How do I know if I have lumbar facet pain?

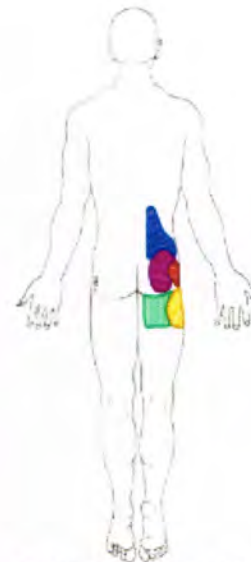
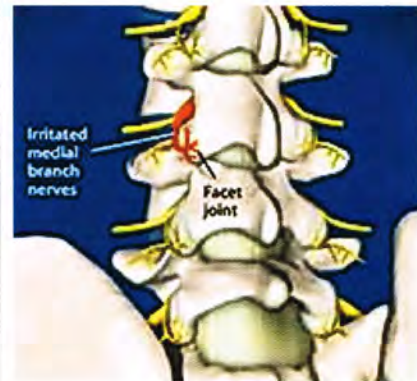
If you have pain in one or more of these areas, and it last longer than two months, you may have lumbar facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRI's may not always show if a facet is causing pain.

What is a lumbar RFL?

RFL uses radiofrequency energy to disrupt nerve function. When this is done to a lumbar medial branch nerve, the nerve can no longer transmit pain from an injured facet joint.

What happens during an RFL?

A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle near the facet joint. X-ray will be used to position the needle. The doctor will then check to make sure it is at the correct nerve by stimulating it. This may cause muscle twitching and provoke some of your pain. Once the needle is properly placed, the nerve will be numbed. Radiofrequency energy will then be used to disrupt the medial branch nerve. This is repeated for each level needed.



Based on Patel S, Chetty K, Bhattacharya S, Ghosh A, Karimian H, Rajaguru G. Distribution of lumbar facet pain from the lumbar zygapophysial joint and its treatment. The Clinical Journal of Pain 1997; 13: 325-332.

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What happens after an injection?

You will be monitored for up to 60 minutes after the RFL. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions. Take it easy for the rest of the day. You may feel sore for one to four days. It may be due to muscle and nerve irritation. Your back may feel weak, numb or itchy for a couple of weeks. You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

How long can I expect pain relief?

Nerves regenerate after a RFL, but how long this takes varies. Your pain may or may not return when the nerves regenerate. If it does, another RFL can be done.



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