

Lumbar Facet Injection

What are lumbar facet joints?

Facet joints (also known as the Zygapophysial joints or Z-joints) are paired structures at the back of each vertebra (spinal column bones). The facet joints, like other joints in the body, form a working motion unit that allows movement between two vertebrae.

The term "lumbar" refers to the lower part of the back. Similar to the shoulder or knee joints, lumbar facet joints are surrounded by a capsule that bathes the moving parts in lubricating fluid.

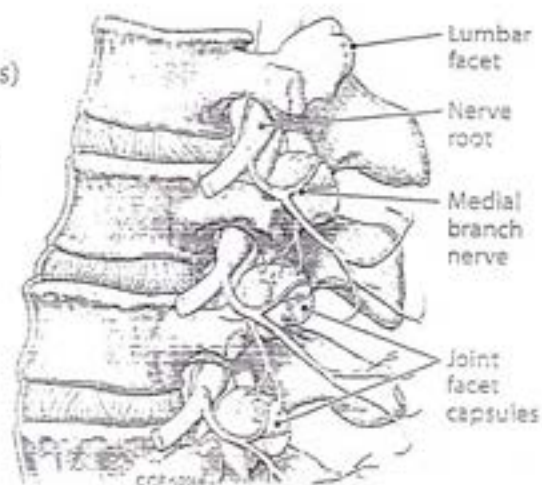
There are two lumbar facet injection techniques used to decrease lumbar facet pain: lumbar medial branch block and lumbar intra-articular injection.

What is a lumbar medial branch block injection?

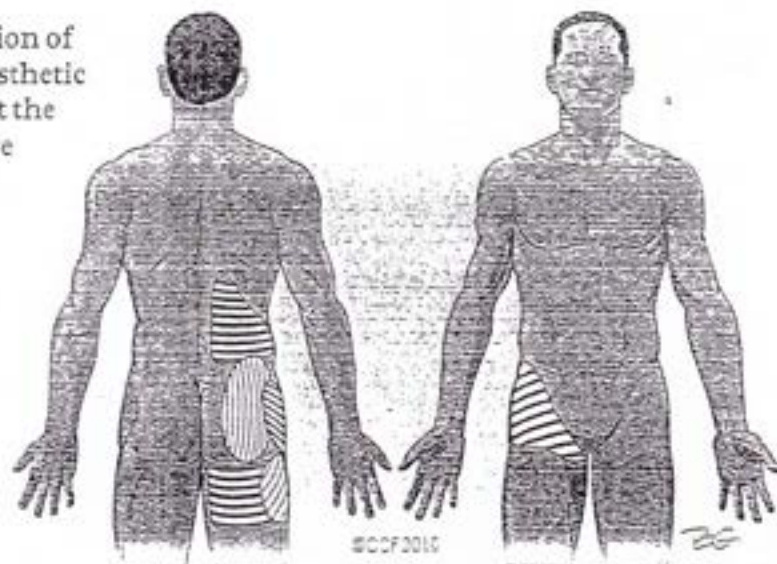
A lumbar medial branch block is an injection of anesthetic medication onto the nerves that transmit pain information. The nerves that transmit pain are called medial branch nerves. For this reason, the procedure is called a lumbar medial branch block. The goal of the shot is to relieve pain in your lower back.

What is lumbar intra-articular injection?

A lumbar intra-articular injection is an injection of an anti-inflammatory medication and an anesthetic into the joint capsule of the facet joint to treat the pain in your lower back (as shown in the figure to the right). The goal of this injection is to improve your spine motion as well as provide pain relief.



Facet joints and medial branch nerves



Lumbar facet joint pain sites

Before the procedure

You will meet with a doctor who will review the risks and benefits of the procedure and answer any questions you may have. The potential side effects include, but are not limited to:

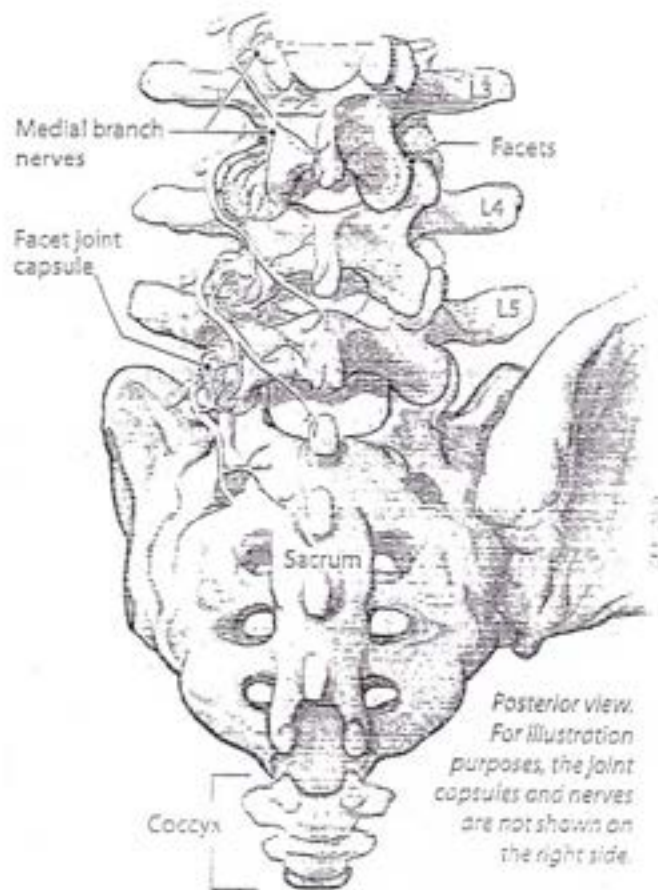
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Temporary increase in pain

Two weeks before the procedure:

- Let us know if you have bleeding disorders, or if you are using blood thinners like aspirin, Coumadin® (warfarin), Plavix® (clopidogrel), Ticlid® (ticlopidine), heparin, Lovenox® (enoxaparin), Fragmin® (dalteparin), Aggrenox® (dipyridamole), or NSAIDS (such as ibuprofen, naproxen, nabumetone, diclofenac, etodolac, indomethacin, ketorolac, meloxicam, piroxicam, ketoprofen, oxaprozin), or especially any herbal blood-thinning medications. The above listed medications may increase risk of bleeding complications.
- If you are taking a blood thinner, please call your primary care physician or cardiologist and ask if it is safe to stop the medication. They will instruct you on how to stop it when it is time for your injection. This will decrease the likelihood of bleeding complications.
- Please honestly review all your medications with us prior to your facet injection or nerve block procedure. Please inform our staff about any medication changes.
- Please let us know if you have had fevers, antibiotic treatment, any illnesses, or hospitalization within the last 4 weeks. You must be healthy on the day of the procedure.

The day of the procedure

- You will be fully awake during the procedure. Sedation is occasionally used. Discuss with your physician or staff when scheduling the procedure.
- If you have diabetes, your blood sugar numbers may increase. Your primary care physician or our staff will counsel you regarding management. Bring your diabetes medication with you so you can take it after the procedure.
- Continue to take all medications, **ESPECIALLY BLOOD PRESSURE MEDICATIONS**. Bring all your medications with you so you can take them as needed after the procedure. Please note: your blood sugar and blood pressure will need to be within a safe range on the day of the



Facet joints and medial branch nerves
(posterior view)

During the procedure

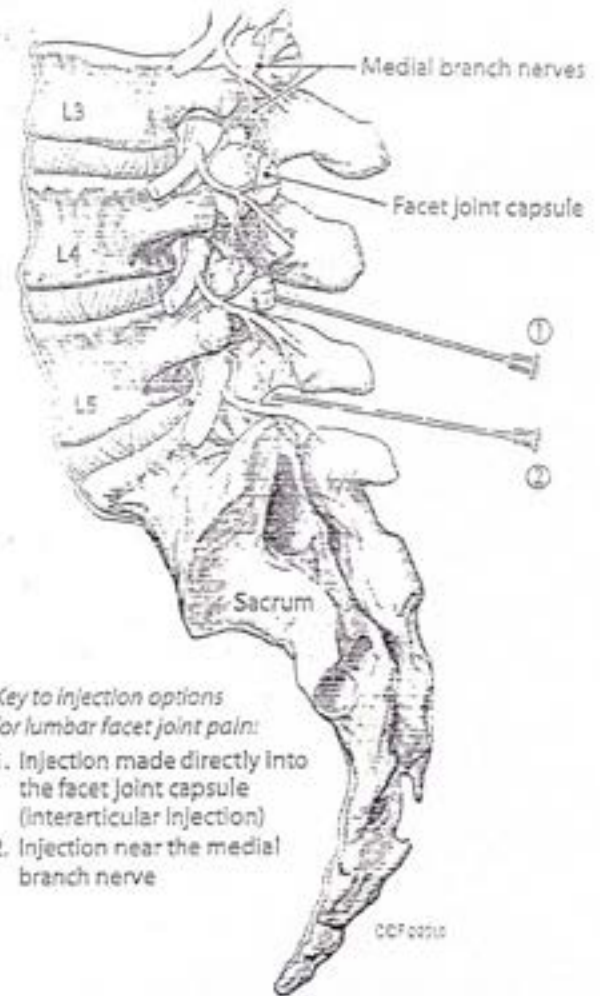
- The procedure will take approximately 10 to 30 minutes.
- You will be lying face down during the procedure.

After the procedure

- Pain relief may begin immediately after the medication has been injected. You may experience a brief recurrence of your former pain until the anti-inflammatory medication takes effect. Apply ice to the injection area to decrease discomfort.
- A bandage may be placed over the injection site.
- You will rest, lying down, in a recovery room for 15 to 30 minutes.
- A nurse will check your blood pressure and pulse. The nurse will also discuss your discharge instructions with you.
- A responsible adult must drive you home. You must not drive yourself.

Discharge instructions

- Do not drive or operate machinery for at least 24 hours after the procedure.
- You may eat your normal diet.
- Do not participate in strenuous activity that day.
- You may remove any bandages the morning following the procedure.
- You may take a shower. Do not take a bath or sit in a hot tub for 24 hours.
- If you are taking a blood thinner like aspirin, Plavix, Ticlid, Coumadin, heparin, Lovenox, among others, you may restart it.



Injection options for lumbar facet joint pain