



TITLE

# Facet Joint Neurotomy

SUMMARY

Facet joint neurotomy procedures are low-risk interventional procedures used to provide long-term relief for facet joint pain, also called posterior element pain. This factsheet explains how and why you may consider this procedure, as well as the potential risks and recovery requirements.

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## FACT JOINT PAIN

A significant number of spinal pain issues stem from your spine's facet joints. The facet joints, the muscles behind them and the connective tissues that support them are collectively referred to as the 'posterior elements'. Posterior element pain is most commonly associated with lower back pain and neck pain (and, less commonly, with upper back pain). There are two classes of procedures used for facet joint pain.

### DIAGNOSTIC PROCEDURES

Imaging studies can't reveal posterior element pain. For this reason, a diagnostic procedure must be performed to confirm the diagnosis. The current gold standard for

diagnosing posterior element pain is a facet joint injection or medial branch block.

### INTERVENTIONAL PROCEDURES

Once we have determined whether a significant proportion of your pain is coming from the facet joints, we can use an interventional procedure to provide longer lasting relief. **A facet joint neurotomy is the most effective method of relieving facet joint pain, long term.**

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P A I N L E S S

## **Facet Joint Neurotomy**

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Facet joint neurotomies are low-risk interventional procedures used to provide long-term relief for facet joint pain, also called posterior element pain.

Neurotomies work by altering the function of the nerves associated with the painful facet joint. This stops pain signals originating in the joint from being reported to the brain. In so doing, it reduces your pain.

There are three approaches to performing facet joint neurotomies.

### **PULSED RADIOFREQUENCY**

Pulsed Radiofrequency (RF) is the predominant form of facet joint neurotomy performed at Painless. It has lower risks and fewer side effects than other forms of facet joint neurotomies. During the procedure, low heat is applied to the pain-generating nerve(s) for short periods of time. Rather than destroying the nerve (as other neurotomies do), Pulse RF modulates the nerve's function.

### **CRYOTHERAPY**

This method involves freezing the nerves associated with the facet joint in pain. We use this approach if you have a pacemaker or a health condition for which pulse RF cannot be performed.

### **THERMAL ABLATION**

This method involves burning the nerves associated with the facet joint in pain. We do not perform this

procedures at Painless due to the associated risk and complications.

### **HOW IT WORKS**

1. You are placed under light anaesthetic sedation.
2. Imaging is used to place the probes on a nerve associated with the facet joint.
3. Pulse RF or cryotherapy is performed on the nerve.
4. This process is repeated for each nerve associated with the affected facet joints.
5. The procedure is completed and you are moved to the recovery room.

### **EFFECTS**

Neurotomies tend to be more uncomfortable than other facet joint procedures. Your pain may worsen for several days before you feel the procedure's effects.

Neurotomies work by altering the function of your nerves, thereby reducing your pain. These effects begin to occur after several days, and gradually increase over the following four to six weeks.

Of the three approaches, pulse RF neurotomies provide the longest lasting pain relief. The results generally last between one and two years.

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Note: In some cases, complex spinal pain will be treated with a combination of facet joint neurotomies and epidural steroid injections, which take two to four weeks to reach their full effect.

## SIDE EFFECTS

**Common Side Effects:** Local bruising or swelling over the needle site and increased back pain for several days after the procedure.

If paired with epidural or steroidal injections, you may experience increased sensitivity to pain over the injection areas for up to four weeks.

**Rare Side Effects:** Infection, abnormal bleeding, leg pain or numbness over the site of the facet joint, which could last for weeks to months.