



THORACIC FACET JOINT SPRAIN

WHAT IS A THORACIC FACET JOINT SPRAIN?

A facet joint sprain can be defined as an irritation, dysfunction, rotation or compression at the specific spinal joint that connects one vertebra to another, either above or below.

ANATOMY FACTS:

1. There are 12 thoracic vertebra;
2. Each of these vertebra connect to the vertebra above and below via facet joints and the intervertebral disc, together known as the functional unit;
3. The thoracic spine is more rigid when compared to the lower back and neck;
4. During movement the facet joints glide or move in relation to one another, which in turn allows smooth movements;
5. Facet joints play an important role in spine shock absorbing and stabilizing.

CAUSES AND CONTRIBUTERS OF A FACET JOINT SPRAIN:

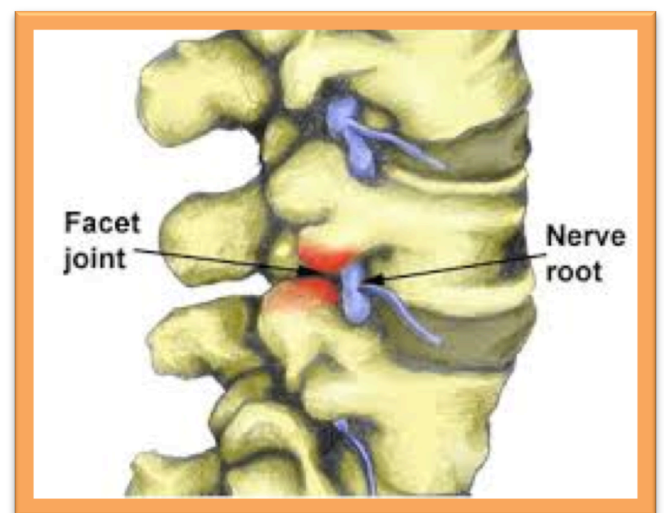
- Thoracic spine and rib hypo or hyper mobility;
- Sudden or poor bending, lifting and/or twisting movements
- Intervertebral disc degeneration causing increased load on the facet joints
- Inappropriate stretching without warming up e.g. overextending first thing in the morning
- Poor posture
- Sedentary lifestyle

DIAGNOSIS:

A thorough subjective examination will look at the current history of the condition including aggravating and easing factors, mechanism of injury and the effect on activities of daily living. The physiotherapist will check your range of motion, review posture, palpate for pain, stiffness and abnormally irritated joints. There will often be an obvious movement restriction or movement which elicits pain.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

- Morning stiffness
- Decreased range of motion
- Tightness through thoracic spine
- Pain on spinal extension such as reaching above head or leaning backwards
- Sudden onset of back pain
- Localised pain to a specific area
- Muscle spasm.





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PHYSIOTHERAPY TREATMENT OPTIONS:

- Deep tissue massage
- Thoracic manipulation
- Roller exercises
- Stretches
- Muscle energy techniques
- Vertebral mobility exercises
- Active release techniques
- Dry Needling
- Trunk strengthening
- Education
- Postural education and programs
- Pilates

PROGNOSIS:

Minor irritations can often settle in 3-4 days with appropriate treatment although these can persist for 3 or more weeks. It's important to note that even with symptomatic relief within weeks that the joint is often recovering for a longer period and stability exercises are important.