

How a Rear-End Collision Can Cause Facet Joint Injuries

The Hidden Spinal Injury After a Car Accident

When most people think about injuries from a [rear-end car accident](#), they imagine whiplash or perhaps herniated discs. While these are common, another often-overlooked painful injury is damage to the facet joints in the spine. Facet joint injuries can cause severe, lasting back and neck pain that disrupts your life in ways you never expected. Even though the injury may not be obvious on initial scans, it can lead to chronic pain that follows you long after the crash.

At [Smith & Hassler](#), we have represented many Houston accident victims who found themselves living with persistent spinal pain after being hit from behind. Insurance companies frequently try to minimize these cases, arguing that the injury must be minor or unrelated. We know better. Our experienced Houston attorneys collaborate with top medical experts to determine the full extent of facet joint damage and fight for the maximum compensation our clients deserve.

What Are Facet Joints and Why Are They Important?

Your spine is made up of small bones called vertebrae, stacked on top of one another to form your spinal column. Between these bones are discs that cushion your spine. Along the back of each vertebra are two pairs of small joints called [facet joints](#). These joints connect each vertebra to the one above and below it, helping stabilize the spine and allowing it to bend, twist, and move smoothly.

Facet joints are lined with cartilage and surrounded by a thin capsule of fluid. When healthy, they let your spine flex without friction. However, if these joints become inflamed or injured, they can cause intense pain and limit range of motion. Because they are richly supplied with nerves, facet joints can also send pain signals throughout the back and into the shoulders, neck, or legs, depending on the location of the injury.

How a Rear-End Accident Can Damage Facet Joints

Rear-end collisions are notorious for causing sudden, violent movement of the neck and back. Even at speeds as low as 10 to 15 miles per hour, your body can snap forward and backward with incredible force. This motion puts extreme stress on the small joints in your spine.

When your vehicle is struck from behind, your torso moves forward, but your head lags behind for a split second, stretching the soft tissues in your neck and upper back. As your head then snaps backward and forward, it forces the facet joints beyond their normal range of motion.

This can:

- Strain or tear the joint capsules
- Grind or jam the cartilage surfaces together
- Lead to inflammation or swelling inside the joint
- Pinch nerves that pass near the joint

Sometimes the impact also compresses the joints in the lower back. For example, if your back is pressed hard into the seat or twisted during the crash, it can overload the lumbar facet joints.

Signs You May Have a Facet Joint Injury After a Crash

Facet joint injuries do not always appear on routine X-rays or even some MRIs, which can make diagnosis challenging. Many people go home from the emergency room with a simple diagnosis of “soft tissue strain” only to have pain that never truly goes away.

Common symptoms of a facet joint injury include:

- Localized pain in the neck or back that gets worse with twisting or bending
- Pain that radiates into the shoulders, upper back, buttocks, or thighs but usually not below the knee
- Increased pain when standing up after sitting or standing for long periods
- Muscle spasms near the spine
- A feeling of stiffness or reduced range of motion in the neck or back

Unlike nerve root injuries, which may cause numbness or weakness in the arms or legs, facet joint pain often remains closer to the spine. It is typically a deep, aching pain that flares with certain movements.

How Doctors Diagnose Facet Joint Injuries

Because these injuries can be difficult to detect on regular imaging studies, doctors often rely on a combination of physical examinations and specialized tests. Your doctor may gently press on your spine to identify tender areas or guide you through movements that reproduce your pain.

If a facet joint injury is suspected, a diagnostic injection may be performed to confirm the diagnosis. This involves injecting a small amount of anesthetic into the suspected facet joint under X-ray guidance. If your pain improves significantly for a short time, it strongly suggests the joint is the source of your pain. This test not only helps with diagnosis but also guides future treatment.

Treating Facet Joint Pain After a Car Accident

Treatment for facet joint injuries usually starts conservatively. Doctors may recommend rest, anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxants, and physical therapy to manage

symptoms. Therapy is often aimed at strengthening the muscles surrounding the spine to support the injured joints better and restore mobility.

When conservative care does not bring enough relief, more advanced options may be explored, such as:

- **Facet joint injections:** These combine a steroid medication with an anesthetic to reduce inflammation and block pain.
- **Radiofrequency ablation:** This procedure uses heat to disable the small nerves transmitting pain signals from the facet joint. Relief can last six months to a year or more.
- **Minimally invasive surgery:** In rare, severe cases where conservative measures fail, a surgeon may recommend a procedure to stabilize or decompress the joint.

Recovering from a facet joint injury can take weeks or months, and some people may experience long-term issues that require periodic treatment. This is why it is so important to consider future medical costs and limitations when evaluating any injury claim.

The Hidden Cost of Living With Facet Joint Pain

People often underestimate the impact of a back or neck injury on their everyday life until it happens to them. Tasks you once did without thinking, like driving, lifting groceries, or even sleeping comfortably, can become sources of constant pain. Many clients also struggle with anxiety and frustration about whether they will ever feel normal again.

On top of the physical pain, the financial impact can be overwhelming. You might miss weeks or months of work, need repeated medical procedures, or find yourself unable to return to the kind of job you held before the crash. Insurance companies are known for undervaluing claims involving chronic spinal pain because these injuries are not always visible on a scan.

That is why having a skilled [Houston car accident lawyer](#) is essential. At Smith & Hassler, we work to make sure the full picture of how your facet joint injury affects your life is documented and presented clearly. This includes gathering detailed medical records, expert opinions, and testimony from individuals who have witnessed firsthand the impact on your life.

What You Can Recover After a Facet Joint Injury

If someone else's negligence caused the crash that led to your injury, you have the right to pursue compensation for all the ways your life has been affected. A settlement or verdict in these cases may include payment for:

- **Medical bills,** from emergency care to ongoing physical therapy or pain management

- **Future treatment costs**, such as injections, radiofrequency ablation, or even surgery
- **Lost wages**, if you missed work while recovering
- **Reduced earning capacity**, if you cannot return to your old job or must take a lower-paying position
- **Pain and suffering**, for the physical discomfort and emotional toll of living with a chronic spinal injury
- **Loss of enjoyment of life**, if you can no longer take part in hobbies, exercise, or family activities the way you used to

Our goal is to secure a settlement that truly covers both your current and future needs, allowing you to focus on healing without worrying about financial stress.

Steps to Take If You Suspect a Facet Joint Injury After a Car Accident

If you were involved in a rear-end crash in Houston and have back or neck pain that does not improve, you should:

- **Seek medical care right away.** Prompt evaluation and treatment not only protect your health but also create a medical record linking your injury to the accident.
- **Follow your doctor's recommendations.** This helps you heal properly and shows the insurance company that you are doing everything possible to recover.
- **Keep a daily journal of your symptoms.** Documenting your pain levels, activities you struggle with, and emotional impacts can be powerful evidence later.
- **Do not discuss your injuries with the other driver's insurance company.** They may try to twist your words to reduce or deny your claim.
- **Contact an experienced Houston car accident attorney.** Having a lawyer on your side levels the playing field and protects your right to full compensation.

Call a Houston Car Accident Lawyer Who Understands Spine Injuries

At Smith & Hassler, we have spent decades fighting for Texans injured in car accidents, including those living with painful, life-altering facet joint injuries. We know what it takes to hold insurance companies accountable and secure the compensation our clients deserve to rebuild their lives.

If you have been hurt in a rear-end collision or any other type of car accident and are now dealing with persistent neck or back pain, do not try to navigate this alone. [Contact us today](#) for a free consultation. Our caring and compassionate team will listen to your story, explain your legal options, and guide you through the next possible steps. You also do not pay anything unless we recover money on your behalf. Let us fight for you so you can focus on your recovery.