

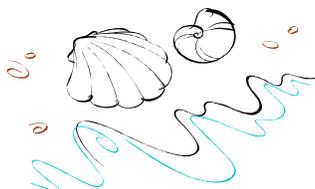
The Rehab Report

Summer 2011

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Kanata Orthopaedic
Physiotherapy Clinic

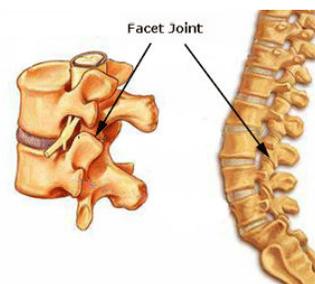


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Low Back Pain and the Facet Joint

When most people think of low back pain, the terms "disc injury" and "strained muscles" tend to come to mind first. However, a lesser known structure in the spine may be responsible for, and contribute in part to, up to 50% of cases of acute low back pain. That structure is the facet joint.



The facet joints are located at the back of the spine on either side of the spinal column. They form the articular surface between a vertebral bone and its neighbouring bones above and below it. The joints are enclosed within a joint capsule of ligaments, and may have a cartilage meniscus within the joint space. The role of the facet joint is to limit excessive movement and to provide stability to the spine. Injuries to the facet joints can be caused by sudden movements, bending, twisting and lifting. Facet joint problems may also be chronic in nature; that is, the underlying cause of the pain and inflammation within the joint is due to a degenerative condition such as osteo-arthritis.

If you are unfortunate enough to suffer an acute episode of back pain, it is important to seek the advice of a trained medical professional. Most cases of back pain, up to 90%, will resolve well on their own and will not cause long-term injury. A trained physiotherapist is able to form an impression based on your history of injury and physical assessment. There is a multitude of research that shows an early initiation of active exercise as prescribed by your physiotherapist can help to improve and speed up your recovery process following a back injury.

Common Facet Syndrome signs and symptoms:

- Back pain that is worse when bending backwards
- Back pain while sitting
- Back pain while bending towards the affected side

What you can do:

- Consult a registered physiotherapist
- Apply ice in the initial 3-5 days following an acute injury
- In cases of more long-term pain, heat packs may also be helpful
- Use a seating support to improve sitting posture
- Practice exercises that strengthen spine-stabilizing muscles

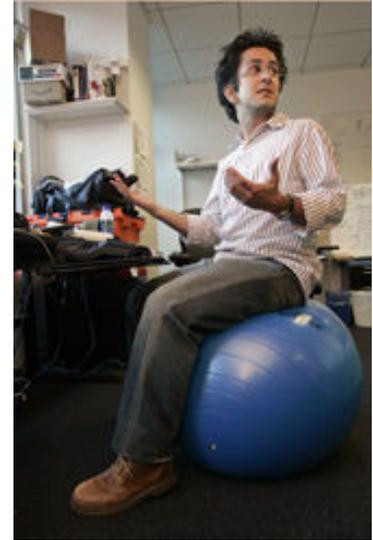


The Fitness Ball as an Office Chair: Fact or Fiction?

There is a plethora of research that confirms the benefit of using a fitness ball for improving balance and core/back strength. Fitness balls have grown immensely in popularity over the past few years and can be found in almost all gyms and many homes as well.

If used correctly as part of an overall training program, many people with chronic back or spinal pain can make improvements in strength and postural awareness by using a ball. However, there is actually no evidence that concludes fitness balls offer similar physical benefits when used as a replacement for an office chair:

- There is an increased risk of falling when getting on or off
- You cannot swivel or navigate your workstation while seated on a ball
- Your buttocks and thighs have insufficient support on a fitness ball
- You do not have a full back support, making it difficult to maintain an upright posture
- Your back muscles work excessively to maintain an upright posture
- You are literally exercising all day, leading to increased fatigue and risk of falls/injuries



Although short-term or infrequent use of a fitness ball may be worthwhile in the office setting, it should not be used as an alternative to an ergonomically sound office chair for prolonged sitting. Therefore, it is recommended to use a fitness ball only in the context of exercising, or for short periods of sitting.

You can consult your physiotherapist if you are interested in designing an exercise plan incorporating your fitness ball.

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Be sure to stay active!

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