

Acute Facet Joint Dysfunction in a Young Female Following Tug of War: A Case Report

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ABSTRACT

Facet joint dysfunction is a common but often underdiagnosed cause of mechanical low back pain, frequently mimicking discogenic pain. It may develop following sudden or repetitive lumbar loading, and recognition of characteristic symptom patterns with positional relief is crucial for accurate diagnosis.

We report the case of a 28-year-old female who presented with gradual-onset low back pain after participating in a tug of war one week earlier. The pain progressively worsened and was aggravated by prolonged sitting, standing, walking, and lying in prone or supine positions, while relief was achieved in side-lying and slouched sitting postures. Neurological examination was normal, with no motor or sensory deficits. Clinical assessment suggested L4-L5 facet joint dysfunction. Conservative management included patient education, activity modification, flexion-biased exercises, cryotherapy with ice

packs, therapeutic ultrasound, and Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS). After three weeks of treatment, the patient reported marked improvement, with pain intensity decreasing from 7/10 to 4/10 on the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS), accompanied by improved tolerance of daily activities.

This case emphasises the importance of considering facet joint dysfunction in young patients presenting with acute low back pain following sudden spinal loading. The presence of pain aggravated by extension and relieved by flexion-related positions provides a valuable clinical clue. Early recognition and targeted conservative management can lead to significant pain reduction, functional recovery, and prevention of chronicity.

Keywords: Mechanical low back pain, Physiotherapy, Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation

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