



Facet Joint Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA)

General Information

Your health care provider has determined that a radiofrequency rhizotomy injection/procedure would be helpful in treating your chronic pain condition. You should have received significant pain-relief (for up to 4-6 hours) from BOTH of your diagnostic medial branch facet blocks in the same region. Using this method to burn/kill the nerves in this area can help treat your pain for up to 6-12 months, depending on the area of the body. The diagnostic facet blocks have demonstrated that burning these nerves should help you with the pain. This procedure is commonly performed to treat a variety of pain syndromes, including:

- Neck pain/certain types of headaches
- Mid back, low back and/or buttock pain

Procedure Information: What to Expect

Prior to the injection appointment, there may be some medications that need to be stopped, and your health care provider will discuss these with you. They could include blood-thinning (anticoagulant), antiplatelet medications and/or anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, Xarelto, Coumadin, Plavix etc.

After arrival and check in, you are brought to the pre-operative area where you will be placed in a gown. You will be escorted to the procedure room. You will lay on your stomach (facing down) on a pillow or gel supports with your back or neck exposed. An X-ray/fluoroscope is used to see the bones to guide needle placement. After a cold, cleaning solution is placed on your skin, it is important not to touch the area once it is cleaned. A cold grounding pad will also be placed on you. You will then feel a pinch and a burn (much like a bee sting), which is the local anesthetic (numbing medicine). After that, you will feel a pressure and a poke. Once the facet area is accessed, medication is injected, which can include steroid, normal saline, and/or local anesthetic. Then a radiofrequency machine is used to heat up the tip of the needle for up to 90 seconds at each level to be treated. The needles are removed, and Band-Aid/paper tape is applied to the injection sites.

You are then escorted to the post-operative area where you will be monitored for up to 30 minutes after the injection. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions and help you make a follow up appointment if one hasn't been made already.

Post-Procedure Instructions

What should I do after the injection?

- Recommend taking it easy for the rest of the day
- You **MAY** do normal routine activities such as return to work, do household tasks etc.
- **DO NOT** participate in strenuous activities
- Resume all medications as instructed by your provider
- You should not be in sitting water (baths, hot tubs, swimming pools, lakes/ponds) for three (3) days after the procedure. **Showers are OK**
- May participate in formal physical therapy sessions 72 hours after your procedure. You may continue performing your home exercise program in the interim
- Keep post-operative appointment to report relief

When will I notice relief?

- Immediate pain relief from the local anesthetic/steroid used in the injectate for a period of time
- Effect of the ablation may take up to 2 weeks to be felt

How long can I expect relief?

- The extent and duration of pain relief may depend on the amount of inflammation in the joint
- **Intended goal is >50% relief for 6-12 months. If so, you may be a candidate for a repeat ablation after six (6) to twelve (12) months**
 - You **will** need to have an office visit prior to ordering a repeat injection to document relief from previous injection(s), updated location of pain and recent physical exam
- It is still common to expect stiffness, soreness and pain with certain activity because the arthritis is still present in the joint. Goal is that certain activities are easier to perform and/or when pain occurs it is easier to overcome that pain with lower peak intensity
- Even though the medial branch nerves are ablated/burned, if you are doing an activity that could cause serious harm or damage to your spine, you **WILL** feel the pain. Radiofrequency ablation **WILL NOT** allow you to injure yourself due to lack of sensation in that area

What other things can I expect?

- Numbness, tingling or transient weakness in the area of pain
- Burning sensation (similar to a sunburn) at the skin level for a few weeks after the ablation for which ice/heat may be applied as tolerated. Pain control with Tylenol, NSAIDs and possibly oral steroids and/or nerve pain medication may be needed
- Some soreness around the injection site for 2-3 days for which ice may be applied and medications such as Tylenol, NSAIDs, muscle relaxants and/or topical agents can be used
- Elevation in blood glucose for 2-3 days (especially if you are diabetic)

Please contact our office (815) 398-9491 if you experience:

- Significant weakness in the arms or legs for more than 24 hours
- Redness or swelling around injection site for more than 24 hours
- Bladder or bowel accidents and/or numbness around the groin
- Fever or chills