

# Radiofrequency Ablations

## General Post-Procedure Information about Radiofrequency Ablations

Radiofrequency ablation (RFA) is a procedure used to reduce pain. An electrical current produced by a radio wave is used to heat up a small area around nerve tissue, thereby decreasing pain signals from that specific area.

## Which Conditions are Treated with Radiofrequency Ablation?

RFA can be used to help patients with chronic (long-lasting) low back and neck pain and pain related to the degeneration of joints from arthritis, as well as some forms of cancer-related pain.

## How Long Does Pain Relief from Radiofrequency Ablation Last?

The degree of pain relief varies, depending on the cause and location of the pain. Pain relief from RFA can last from six to 12 months and in some cases, relief can last for years. More than 70 percent of patients treated with RFA experience pain relief.

## Is Radiofrequency Ablation Safe?

RFA has proven to be a safe and effective way to treat some forms of pain. It also is generally well-tolerated, with very few associated complications.

There is a slight risk of infection and bleeding at the insertion site. Your doctor can advise you about your particular risk.

## What are the Side Effects of Radiofrequency Ablation?

The main side effect of RFA is some discomfort, including swelling and bruising at the site of the treatment, but this generally goes away after a few days.

## Who Should Not Get Radiofrequency Ablation?

As with any medical procedure, RFA is not appropriate for everyone. For example, radiofrequency ablation is not recommended in people who have active infections or bleeding problems. Your doctor can tell you if you should not have RFA.

## How Do I Prepare for the Procedure?

To not eat within six hours of your appointment. You may have clear liquids until four hours before the procedure.

If you have diabetes and use insulin, you must adjust the dosage of insulin the day of the procedure. Your primary care doctor will help you with this adjustment. Bring your diabetes medication with you so you can take it after the procedure.

Discontinue your pain medication (if any) four hours before the time of your appointment. Continue to take all other medications with a small sip of water. Bring all medication with you so you can take it after the procedure. Please note: Do not discontinue any medication without first consulting with your primary or referring physician.

You will need to bring someone with you to drive you home after the procedure. You should not drive or operate machinery until the day after your procedure.

## What Happens During the Procedure?

An intravenous (IV) line may be placed in a vein in your arm before the procedure.

You will be lying on your stomach and both local anesthesia and a mild sedative may be used to reduce any discomfort during the procedure. You will be awake during the process to aid in properly pinpointing the nerve.

After the local anesthesia has been administered, your doctor will insert a small needle into the general area where you are experiencing pain. Using x-ray, your doctor will guide the needle to the exact target area. A microelectrode is then inserted through the needle to begin the stimulation process.

During the procedure, your doctor will ask you if you are able to feel a tingling sensation. The object of the stimulation process is to help your doctor determine if the electrode is in the optimal area of treatment.

Once the needle and electrode placement is verified, a small radiofrequency current is sent through the electrode into the surrounding tissue, causing the tissue to heat.

## What Happens After the Procedure?

You will stay in a recovery room for observation, where a nurse will check your blood pressure and pulse.

A bandage will be placed over the injection site.

The nurse will review your discharge instructions with you.

Someone must drive you home.

## Can I Resume My Normal Activities After the Procedure?

You may resume normal activities as your comfort level allows, but do not engage in any strenuous activities for the first 24 hours after the procedure.

You can return to work 24 hours after your procedure. If you have a physically demanding job you may want to take 1-2 days off.

You may eat whatever you wish and resume all prior medications.

If you had sedation you must not drink alcohol, or sign important documents for at least 12 hours.

Do not take a bath, hot tub or go swimming for three days after the procedure; you may shower.

You may remove any bandages in the evening before you go bed.

If you have a physically demanding job, you may want to take 1-2 days off.

You should not drive today or operate machinery for at least 24 hours after the procedure.

## What Side Effects May I Experience Following the Procedure?

### **You may experience the following side effects after the procedure:**

Leg muscle weakness or numbness: If you have any leg weakness or numbness, walk only with assistance. This should only last a few hours.

Mild discomfort in the back. This may occur when the local anesthetic wears off and usually lasts two or three days, if it occurs. Apply ice to the

area the day of the procedure and moist heat the day after the procedure if the discomfort persists.

Call your doctor for temperature greater than 101.

Call doctor for swelling, redness or discharge from the injection site.