

Patient Information

Radiofrequency Ablation

What is Radiofrequency Ablation?

Radiofrequency ablation (RFA) is a minimally invasive procedure that uses heat generated by radio waves to interrupt signals carried by a targeted nerve. It is most commonly performed on the small nerves supplying the facet joints of the spine (lumbar, thoracic or cervical), but can also be applied to other nerves throughout the body where pain signals need to be reduced.

Preparation

No preparation is required although it is important to contact us and let us know if any of the following apply

- You are taking blood thinning medications
- You are a diabetic
- You have a known allergy to local anaesthetic or CT contrast dye (iodine)
- You have a pacemaker or other implanted device
- You are or may be pregnant.

We require you to come with **someone to assist you and drive you home after the procedure**. Public transport is not acceptable. *Should your circumstances be that you do not have anyone to accompany you, please contact us immediately to discuss.*

How long will it take?

The procedure usually takes about 30-60 minutes depending on the number of nerves being treated. Please allow up to 2 hours for your visit including preparation and a short recovery period following the procedure

What to expect

The procedure will be performed by a radiologist who will be assisted by our radiographers.

You will be asked to change into a gown and positioned to allow the best access to the treatment area. A series of planning scans will be taken so that the exact position of the target nerve can be identified and marked.

Your skin will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution and the radiologist will inject the area with a local anaesthetic to numb the region. The needle is then carefully advanced to the target nerve under continuous image guidance. A brief electrical stimulation test may be performed to confirm correct positioning — you may feel a mild tingling or pressure sensation during this step.

Once the needle is confirmed in the correct position, the nerve is heated for approximately 60–90 seconds per site. Multiple nerves can be treated in a single session. Finally, long term local anaesthetic and cortisone are injected around the treated nerve in order to minimise discomfort which may arise following the treatment.

After Your Procedure

You will rest in our recovery area for a short time after the procedure. Some soreness at the treatment site for several days is normal. Pain relief from RFA may take 1–3 weeks to develop fully as the nerve settles; maximum benefit is typically seen within 4–6 weeks

For your comfort it is recommended you:

- Take it easy for the next 48 hours
- Resume your normal activities as limited by pain
- You may apply ice to the affected area
- You may continue with physiotherapy etc.

It is important to keep a record of your progress so we have provided a 'Post Procedure Pain Diary' for you to keep over the next 2 weeks after the procedure. You should take this with you to report back to your doctor when you next see them so they can assess how successful this procedure was for you.

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Any beneficial effect may eventually wear off. This is very variable, but the beneficial effect usually lasts several months. The area can be injected again if required.

Possible Side-Effects and Complications

In general, RFA is a very safe procedure, but there are some potential complications that may occur.

The main ones include:

- The procedure may cause increased soreness for a day or two before the effect develops
- Facial redness, which occurs over the next twenty-four (24) hours, is a side effect of any steroid component; it settles over the next 24–48 hours. You may also feel restless or have some difficulty sleeping for 1–2 days.
- Bruising or swelling at the needle site.
- Increased blood sugar levels in diabetics.
- Unfortunately, a small number of patients have no relief of symptoms.
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Rarer complications may include:

- Allergic reaction to local anaesthesia or other medications used
- Infection of the needle site
- Bleeding at the needle site or bleeding into the soft tissues or joint.
- Local skin discolouration, local loss of pigment, or skin contour change at the site of injection. This may last months or be permanent.

Questions?

You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions of the technicians or radiologist at the time of your procedure, however if you have any queries prior to the appointment, please feel free to contact us by phone or email – 02 9170 4500 or contact@nsrnm.com.au

If you have any questions regarding **why** the procedure is required, these should be directed to your specialist or the doctor looking after you. We are happy to re-schedule your booking so you can discuss it with your doctor.

