



RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATIONS

What is Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA)?

Radiofrequency ablation is a minimally invasive procedure that is usually performed with local anesthetic and mild sedation. As with many spinal injections, radiofrequency neurotomy is best performed under fluoroscopy (live x-ray) for guidance in properly targeting and placing the needle (and for avoiding nerve or other injury).

RFA works in a way similar to medial branch block injections. The patient is given a local anesthetic to eliminate discomfort, and a fine needle is placed near the nerves responsible for chronic pain using x-ray guidance. Unlike a medial branch block injection, which delivers steroids and anesthetics to the nerves, radiofrequency ablation needle tips are heated while in place using an electrical current, effectively destroying the nerve tissues altogether.

It is common for patients to feel a slight tingling sensation during treatment, although most patients should not feel any discomfort. Following the procedure, patients may experience slightly more pain than usual for approximate 7 to 14 days, at which time it will begin to dissipate. Patients are encouraged to avoid physical activity for the first few days following RFA treatment and to return for a check-up within a few weeks.

RFA is considered to be a more long-term treatment than joint injections, although patients do not always receive permanent relief. In some cases, the nerves eventually grow back, at which time patients can undergo RFA treatment again.

