

Radiofrequency Lesioning

About the procedure

Radiofrequency lesioning is done to reduce back pain. Radiofrequency current is used to heat up a small portion of nerve tissue, interrupting pain signals from a specific area. The most common areas of treatment are the facet joints in the neck, thoracic and lumbar area. The procedure usually is done as an outpatient procedure by a physician trained in pain management.

Before the procedure

- Tell your physician if you are on warfarin (Coumadin™) or antiplatelet therapies.
- Arrange for someone to drive you home after the procedure. You should not drive for 24 hours after the procedure if you have had sedation.
- Eat and drink as usual unless you have requested sedation.
- If you are being sedated, have nothing to eat or drink for 4 hours before the procedure expect for sips of water with your medications.
- Take your usual medications, including pain medications, unless instructed otherwise by your physician.

During the procedure

- You may have an intravenous (IV) catheter placed in your arm. You may be given medication through the IV that will reduce the pain of the procedure. The medication may make you drowsy.
- The procedure will be done in a room equipped with an X-ray machine called a fluoroscope.
- You will lie on your abdomen or on your side on an X-ray table.
- You will have a sensor put on your finger that will monitor your pulse and oxygen level.
- Your back will be cleaned with an antiseptic.
- Needles will be placed in the identified parts of your back/neck. A machine will generate radiofrequency impulses through these needles. Medication also will be delivered through these needles.
- You may be asked questions during the procedure such as whether you have tingling or pressure sensation.
- The procedure usually takes about 30 minutes, but it may take longer depending on the number of levels being treated.

After the procedure

- You will return to the examination room and rest for 20 to 30 minutes.
- Your physician will tell you when you may leave.

Side effects

Common side effects may include:

- Temporary weakness.
- Temporary numbness
- Pain at the injection sites.

Rare side effects may include:

- Long-term weakness.
- Paralysis.
- Dizziness.
- Bowel and bladder incontinence.

Discuss all possible side effects with your physician.

Care following the procedure

- Limit your activities, especially strenuous activities, for the remainder of the day. If you have any questions about activity, ask your physician or nurse.
- You should not drive for 24 hours after the procedure, if you have had sedation.
- Put an ice pack on the injection sites for 20 minutes, three or four times during the first 24 hours after your procedure.
- Bathe as usual. However, do not use a hot tub, whirlpool or sauna for 24 hours after your procedure.
- Eat and drink as usual. However, to avoid dehydration, drink more fluids such as water, juice and caffeine-free carbonated beverages and tea.
- Continue to take your usual medications unless instructed otherwise by your physician.
- Call your physician or go to the emergency room if any of the following occur:
 - You have a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius or greater.
 - The injection sites become red, swollen, tender or warm.
 - Fluid drains from the injection sites.
 - The injection sites have an odor.