

Radiofrequency Ablation

Nerves treated with radiofrequency ablation (ah-BLAY-shun) cannot carry pain signals to your brain. This method can help relieve pain in the back, legs and other body parts. It uses heat to disconnect the nerve that transmits pain to the brain. It can take 2 to 3 weeks for the nerves to die.

You can still move the body part after you are treated. If pain is reduced by half, treatment is counted as a success. These nerves often grow back within 6 months to 1 year. Sometimes the pain relief can last even longer. Treatment can then be repeated.

Risks

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Increased pain
- Allergic reaction to the medications given

If steroids are used, common side effects include:

- Flushing
- Headache
- Trouble sleeping
- Warm feeling
- Nervousness

If any of these occur, they should only last a few days.

Benefits

- Reduced pain for longer periods of time
(6 months to 1 year or longer)

Alternatives

- Keep taking pain medicine or non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen and others)
- Physical therapy
- Surgery

How to prepare

A nurse will call and give you instructions if you take a blood thinner or anticoagulant medicine. Tell your doctor if:

- You have had any vaccines in the last 2 weeks.
- You have an implanted stimulator or cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator. If you have a stimulator, bring your handheld remote.

You cannot drive home after this treatment. **Arrange for someone take you home.**

You may be given medicine to make you sleepy for this procedure. If so, a nurse will call to give you special diet and medicine instructions.

If you will be having sedation during this treatment, have your driver stay at Gundersen during your procedure. Your driver must be a family member, friend, or Gundersen approved transportation service. Ask if you have questions.

During treatment

Your skin will be cleansed with special soap and antiseptic to reduce the chance of infection. Medicine to numb your skin will be given by needle in the area the doctor will work on. This may burn and sting.

After your skin is numb, the doctor will insert a cannula (KAN-yoo-la) where the nerves are located. This is a hollow, needle-like tool with a tip that heats up. An x-ray is used to guide precise placement to the nerve. You may feel a tingle or some pressure each time a nerve is treated. In most cases, the treatment takes about 30 minutes. It may take longer. It depends on how many nerves must be treated.

After treatment

You will go to the recovery area. A staff member may place an ice pack on the needle entry sites. You will rest and have something to drink. Staff will tell you when it is okay for you to leave.

You may feel numb or weak at the places where needles entered your skin. You may also have some discomfort at these sites. This will ease over the next few days.

While you recover

Do not drive for 3 to 4 hours. Do not drive until 6 a.m. the next day if you have had sedation.

Take it easy for the rest of the day. Do not play sports, do housework or things that make you move fast or lift more than 10 pounds. (That is what a gallon of milk weighs.) Ask your doctor or nurse what activities are safe.

Your legs may feel numb or weak from the numbing medicine. You may not notice the weakness until you try to walk. Do not try to walk if your legs are weak. Stay seated and wait for it to go away. It can take up to 1 hour.

You may shower. Do not use a bathtub, hot tub or whirlpool for 2 days. You may put an ice pack on the site 20 minutes out of every hour if needed.

Take your usual medicine unless your doctor tells you to do something else.

If you received steroids with your procedure:

- **Do not** use heating pads or any other form of heat on the site for 2 days. Heat may make the drug spread beyond the place where you need the most pain relief.
- **Do not have any vaccines in the next 2 weeks.**
- If you have diabetes, the steroid may make your blood sugar rise. Talk to your doctor or diabetes educator to learn how to adjust your diet and medicine.

Contact information

Call and ask for a nurse who works with your doctor if you have questions or any of these problems:

- Fever of 101° F or higher
- Redness, swelling or warm skin where you were treated
- Drainage or odor at needle entry sites
- Increased pain or weakness

8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. weekdays

Neurosciences

(608) 775-9000 or (800) 362-9567, ext. 59000

After hours, weekends and holidays

Telephone Nurse Advisor

(608) 775-4454 or (800) 858-1050

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This information is meant to inform and educate our patients. It supports the care you receive from your health care team. It does not replace medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk to your doctor or health care team before starting any new treatment.

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