
Medial or Lateral Branch Block

This diagnostic nerve block is used to find the source of your pain. It will not give long term pain relief. You may have this test if your back or neck pain seems to be caused by arthritis in the facet joints (sides) of the vertebrae of your spine.

Numbing medicine is injected near the nerves that may be causing the pain. You will keep track of your pain for the next day to see if it gets better. If the pain lessens for a while and comes back, the treated nerves are likely the source of your pain. Your doctor may talk with you about your options for longer lasting pain relief.

If the pain does not get better, then the vertebrae or lower back joints may not be your problem.

Risks

- Dizziness
- Backache
- Nerve irritation or damage
- Bleeding
- Infection
- Allergic reaction to the medicine

Benefits

- Helps find the source of pain
- Helps with future pain control

Alternatives

- Physical therapy
- Keep using pain medicine or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen and others)
- Change your activities to things that do not cause you pain.

How to prepare

Tell your doctor about any of the following:

- You take a blood thinner or anticoagulant medicine.
- You have any allergies to x-ray dye (contrast), iodine or latex, or anything else.
- You are pregnant.
- You have an implanted stimulator or cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator. If you have a stimulator, bring your handheld remote to your RFA appointment.

You will not be able to drive after this treatment. **Arrange for someone to drive you home.**

During the treatment

You will lie on your stomach or side. Your skin will be cleaned and covered by a sterile drape. The doctor will then inject medicine to numb the skin. This will sting for a few seconds. The doctor will use a special X-ray called a fluoroscope (FLOR-o-scope) to guide the needle to the exact place. The injected medicine may numb the nerve.

After the treatment

You can apply an ice pack to the site. The doctor or nurse will let you know when you can leave. For 3 or 4 hours, you may notice one or more of these effects:

- Your hands, arms, legs or feet may tingle or feel numb.
- Your hands, arms, legs or feet may feel weak.
- Skin where the needle entered may be tender for 1 or 2 days. You may have a bruise.
- Your skin at the injection site may be numb.

While you recover

For the rest of the day, try doing things that often cause you pain. Rate your pain level on the Pain Control Log as instructed.

Do not drive for 3 to 4 hours.

Do not do any heavy lifting or energetic activities. Do not lift more than 10 pounds (That is what a gallon of milk weighs.) Do not do anything that requires you to move quickly.

Your legs may feel numb or weak from the numbing medicine or procedure. 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 apply an ice pack on the site for 20 minutes. You can do this 3 or 4 times during the first 24 hours.

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

Do not use heating pads or any other form of heat on the site for 1 day. Heat may make the drug spread beyond the place where you need the most pain relief.

Call to review your Pain Control Log in 1 to 2 days. Call (608) 775-9135 or (800) 362-9567 ext. 59135.

Contact information

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

Neurosciences

(608) 775-9000 or (800) 362-9567, ext. 59000. Ask for a nurse who works with your doctor if you have questions or problems.

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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