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Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Radiofrequency Ablation of Nerves

Radiofrequency ablation uses high-frequency alternating current flow to generate heat and destroy pain sensing nerves. A narrow electrode is introduced to the affected nerve. Precisely controlled generator heat is generated to destroy the nerve.

When is Radiofrequency Ablation used?

Radiofrequency ablation is used when there is:

- Back or neck pain caused by facet joint disease.
- Trigeminal neuralgia
- Low back pain originating from a disk(s).
- Stellate ganglionotomy – for sympathetically mediated pain of upper extremity
- Lumbar sympathectomy – for sympathetically mediated pain of lower extremity.

What happens during Radiofrequency Ablation?

You will be asked to lie on the x-ray table. If you have pain caused by facet joint disease you will need to lie on your stomach. A local anesthesia is given to numb the area around the nerve. Using x-ray guidance, a needle is advanced to the correct location and then connected to the machine that will stimulate the nerve. Once it is decided that no motor stimulation is obtained, the radiofrequency probe is inserted through the needle. The tip of the probe is heated and the nerve is destroyed. You may experience some numbness or weakness of the affected area right after the procedure. You can either have immediate pain relief or no pain relief at all.

What are the possible side effects?

- Nerve irritation
- Back pain where needle is inserted
- Leg weakness

What do I need to do after the procedure?

You need someone to drive you home.