

Patient Information: Radiofrequency Denervation of Joints

What is Radiofrequency Denervation?

Radiofrequency denervation or **rhizolysis** is a specialized form of intervention. The aim is to cause heat damage to the nerves that supply the **facet** or **sacroiliac joints**. Each facet joint is supplied by two nerves, so several nerves may need to be treated. The nerves transmit pain sensation from the joints and have little other function. By causing a heat lesion, pain from the joints are not transmitted and there is ensuing pain relief.

What does it involve?

You will be lying on your front for the procedure, which usually takes **30-60 minutes**. Local anaesthetic is injected into the skin and fine needles are passed toward the nerves under x-ray guidance. Using an x-ray machine to guide, a needle is placed upon the nerve to be lesioned. A thin wire (probe) is then passed through the needle sheath. The position of the probe is very important so it is checked by 2 tests:

- **Sensation** – You may feel tightness, pressure or tingling in your back
- **Motor** – You may feel some throbbing in your back. If there is throbbing into the leg then the probe is repositioned.

When the probe is in the correct place, the tip is then heated to 80 degrees centigrade to cause a heat lesion to the nerve.

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What is Injected?

- **Local Anaesthetic** – injected before the probe is heated to relieve any discomfort during the lesioning.
- **Local Anaesthetic and steroid** – injected after the probe has been heated to relieve discomfort following the procedure.

Does it Work?

You would already have had a good response to diagnostic injections so radiofrequency offers you a realistic chance of good long term pain relief. You may not feel any benefit for **2 – 3 weeks**. Symptoms can be relieved for up to a year or longer in about half of all patients. Unfortunately the nerve can regenerate so your pain may come back but a repeat procedure is likely to be beneficial if you respond to the first.

Risks and Side Effects:

Due to the procedure:

- Infection – rare.
- More discomfort for the first few days after your injection.
- Bruising to the injection area.
- Leg numbness and weakness are very rare side effects.

Due to the injected steroid:

- Facial flushing for a few days.
- Temporary alteration of your usual menstrual cycle (females).
- Temporary increase in your sugar levels (diabetics).

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What Happens on the Day of My Appointment?

- **You can eat and drink.**
- Take all your tablets as normal. Bring a list of your tablets with you.
- A nurse will take some details from you to check that you are fit for your procedure.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form. The doctor will be able to answer any questions you may have at this time.
- You will be at the Day Unit for about **2 - 4 hours**. This time may vary depending on unforeseen circumstances.
- Please bring a **dressing gown** and **sensible footwear** with you. You will be asked to walk to the treatment room on the Day Unit.
- After you have had your procedure, you will need to stay with us for about **30 minutes** before you can go home.

You must **NOT** drive home or go home on public transport.

Please arrange for someone to collect you from the Day Unit.

You are allowed to go home by taxi.

After Your Injection

- Take things easy for the rest of the day. Do not do any excessive exercise or heavy work for the first few days.
- Remove the dressing the next morning.
- Continue to take your pain tablets till you notice any improvement in your symptoms.

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Important Information

Please inform the Day Unit if you are **diabetic**, have a **cough** or **cold** or have any kind of **infection**.

You must inform us if you are taking any of the following tablets – **antibiotics, aspirin, warfarin** or **clopidogrel** before attending as some of these may need to be stopped some days before.

Information for females - We will need to know the start date of your last menstrual period due to the use of x-ray equipment. If you think you might be pregnant, contact the Day Unit for advice.

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