



# Radiofrequency Ablation

*What to expect from your procedure*

**This handout explains radiofrequency ablation, which “burns” the nerve that is causing your pain.**

**You will need to keep track of your pain symptoms after your procedure and call the clinic to report your results in 4 weeks.**

## **What is radiofrequency ablation?**

*Radiofrequency ablation* is a minimally invasive treatment in which high-frequency electricity is applied to the nerve that sends pain impulses to your brain. This process burns the nerve, which makes it stop sending these impulses.

## **How is it done?**

The doctor will use local anesthetic to numb the skin where a needle will be inserted. The doctor uses X-ray to guide the needle to the correct nerve. To make sure the needle is in the right place, a small “test” dose of electricity is applied to the nerve.

When the needle is placed on the nerve, you will feel tingling, a deep ache, and some muscle twitching. You will tell the doctor when this happens. When the doctor is sure the needle is in the right place, a small amount of anesthetic is injected and then the nerve is burned. You may feel some discomfort.

You may receive a light sedation for this procedure, but you will stay awake so that you can talk with the doctor and answer questions.

## **What results can I expect?**

During the first days or weeks, your pain or numbness might increase, but this should slowly ease. Even though we expect complete pain relief, relief from 50% to 80% of your pain is a good outcome. As many as 80% of patients (8 out of 10) who have this procedure have some pain relief.

Pain relief from the procedure may last 8 to 24 months. But, because nerves usually grow back, your pain might return. If your pain returns after this time, the procedure may need to be done again. But, if your pain relief lasts for less than 6 months, the doctor will not repeat the ablation, since the pain is likely to return more quickly after another procedure.

## **What if the procedure does not help my pain?**

This procedure does not work for everyone. If the procedure does not ease your pain, your doctor will talk with you about other treatment options during your follow-up visit at the Center for Pain Relief.

## **Side Effects**

There is a risk for side effects with any medical procedure. Talk with your doctor about side effects before having any treatment.

Some possible side effects from radiofrequency ablation are:

- Pain at the injection site.
- Infection.
- Bleeding.
- Nerve injury.
- Allergic reaction.
- A burning sensation along the treated nerve.
- Bruising near the treatment site.
- Increased pain and/or numbness, which may last for several weeks.
- Dizziness and unsteady walking if the treatment was applied to nerves in your neck. This may last for several hours.

## **How long does it take?**

The procedure takes about 45 minutes, but plan to spend 2 hours at the clinic from the time you are admitted until you leave.

## **How to Prepare for Radiofrequency Ablation**

### ***Medicine Changes***

**You must stop taking blood-thinning medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), enoxaparin (Lovenox), and others before having radiofrequency ablation.** If you take any blood-thinning medicine, talk with your doctor who prescribed the medicine as soon as you are scheduled for this procedure.

You may keep taking low-dose aspirin and anti-inflammatory medicines.

### ***On the Day of the Procedure***

Note: You may eat and drink as usual if you will **not** receive sedation.

#### **For all patients:**

- Arrive at the clinic at least 30 minutes before your appointment.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Do not wear jewelry.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.:

Call the Center for Pain Relief at 206-598-4282.

After hours and on weekends and holidays:

Call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Pain Fellow on call to be paged.

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- Wear underwear made of only cotton.
- If possible, bring someone with you who can drive you home.
- **If your blood pressure is high and not well-controlled, your procedure may need to be scheduled for another time.**

### If you will be receiving sedation:

- You **must** bring someone with you who can drive you home after the procedure.
- Starting 8 hours before your appointment:
  - Do **not** eat any solid food.
  - For the first 4 hours, you may drink only clear liquids.
  - For the 4 hours before your appointment, do **not** drink anything.
  - If you need to take any medicines during this time, take them with only a small sip of water.

**We will not be able to give you sedation if you do not follow these diet guidelines.**

- **If you will be receiving sedation and you have diabetes**, you must also ask your diabetes care provider how to manage your medicines the morning of your procedure since you will be fasting.

### When can I resume my usual activities?

- If you had sedation, do **not** drive or operate machinery for 24 hours after your procedure.
- If you have pain relief right after your procedure, do **not** start doing all the activities you have not been able to do because of your pain. Remember, you still have the underlying problem that caused your pain. If you overdo it, your pain may return quickly, even within a few days of feeling better.
- It is important to do an exercise program that slowly strengthens the muscles you have not been able to use because of your pain. It will take time to build up your strength.

### Follow-up

Before you go home after having radiofrequency ablation, you will receive the *Patient Self-Reported 4-Week Pain Diary*. Take this form home and fill it out, then call the Center for Pain Relief 4 weeks after your procedure to report your results. You will return to the clinic for a follow-up visit 6 weeks after your procedure.

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