

# Radiofrequency ablation

## What is radiofrequency ablation?

Radiofrequency ablation is an advanced pain management technique that can treat a variety of pain syndromes. The most common use of radiofrequency ablation is in the cervical spine and lumbar spine where the procedure is employed to reduce pain from arthritic joints. Radiofrequency ablation is a technique that employs heat to disable the pain-transmitting nerves in the spine.

The procedure is very safe and is only used on sensory nerves that transmit pain impulses. There is no risk of paralysis or weakness from the procedure. There is also another type of radiofrequency ablation called “pulsed” radiofrequency ablation. This procedure does not use heat to disable the nerve, and is appropriate for treating a wide variety of pain problems that originate in sensory nerves.

## How does radiofrequency ablation relieve my pain?

Radiofrequency ablation uses heat to disable the pain-transmitting nerves in the spine. The process is analogous to microwave ovens that use microwave energy to heat food. Radiofrequency energy is transmitted to the tip of a needle where it is converted to heat, which is applied directly to the nerve fibers. Once the nerves undergo this heat treatment, they slowly stop transmitting pain.

## What can I expect during the procedure?

After checking in at the Surgery Center, you will be interviewed by the admission nurse who will take a full history and start an IV. You will also be seen by the medical staff of the Arizona Pain Clinic prior to the procedure, at which time you will have the opportunity to have any additional questions answered.

After being placed on the treatment table, intravenous sedation will be administered to make the procedure as comfortable as possible. Local anesthetics will be used during the procedure to further ensure your comfort. Following the procedure, you will be allowed to rest for approximately 30 minutes in the recovery area prior to discharge. You must have a responsible adult take you home.

## When will I begin to feel pain relief and how long will it last?

Since this is a different procedure than simply injecting local anesthetics at the site of pain, and it involves heat to injure and disable the nerve, it may take longer for the pain-reducing effects of the procedure to occur. We typically expect that pain reduction may not begin for one to two weeks. By four weeks, you should have a good estimate of how much pain relief will be achieved.

## What is the anticipated recovery from the procedure?

Most patients have minimal difficulties with the procedure. However, a very small percentage of patients may develop a “neuralgia” at the procedure site (especially in the cervical spine.) These symptoms usually resolve. If you continue to have symptoms, please refer to Surgery Center discharge instructions. You also may call the Arizona Pain Clinic if there are any concerns.



9787 N. 91<sup>st</sup> Street, Suite 101  
Scottsdale, Az. 85258  
480-860-8300