

Radiofrequency denervation

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET INT18



Your Appointment:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Please see our website for more branch details.

What is Radiofrequency denervation?

Radiofrequency (RF) denervation is used to reduce pain from facet joints in the lower back by locally treating the nerves that relay pain sensations to the brain.

A radiofrequency current is used to selectively heat the particular nerves in the lower back.

What symptoms can be treated with RF denervation?

RF denervation can be used to treat patients with chronic (long lasting) lower back pain that has not responded to standard treatments.

Please note, not all types of back pain can be treated and you'll need to be assessed to ensure you are suitable for RF treatment.

What happens during the procedure?

Before we perform the RF denervation, we will first perform a test procedure to assess your suitability for RF treatment.

Test procedure (medial branch blocks)

If your doctor thinks you may be a candidate for RF treatment, you will first be sent for CT guided medial branch blocks, where local anaesthetic is injected around the nerves to see if your back pain is improved.

It is very important to be honest with yourself in regards to whether you feel better after the test to ensure that you have the best chance of good long term improvement from any subsequent RF treatment.

If you don't have a good response, your doctor will look for alternative causes of pain.

For the test procedure, you will first complete a back pain questionnaire. You will then be

asked to change into a gown and be positioned on your stomach on the CT table.

The treatment area on your lower back will be sterilised and then, by using skinny needles, local anaesthetic is injected around the facet joint nerves. This procedure takes about 15 minutes.

You can leave our department after 15 minutes with a carer to drive you home.

We will phone you two hours post procedure to ascertain if your pain symptoms have improved and by how much.

This provides useful information to assess your suitability for the RF treatment.

The radiofrequency treatment

For those patients assessed to be suitable for RF denervation, the process is similar to the test procedure, except the overall time on the CT table is approximately 30 minutes.

Local anaesthetic is used and the RF procedure is well tolerated. Each treatment site should not be overly sore or uncomfortable.

Following the procedure

You will get changed into your normal clothes and then remain under observation in our department for approximately 30 minutes.

You should arrange for a carer to drive you home.

The RF treatment should not limit your daily activities. You will be able to return to a normal diet once you return home. Your doctor may suggest avoiding heavy exertion and lifting for several days.

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Risks

RF is generally considered safe and effective. Most people tolerate the procedure very well, without complications.

There is a very small risk of bleeding and infection.

Post anaesthetic, some side effects may include slight discomfort in the area of the treatment and some minor swelling and bruising at the site of the injection.

How long does the treatment last?

The extent of pain relief may differ.

There is good clinical evidence for significant long lasting pain relief from facet joint pain (up to 6 to 12 months).

This represents significantly longer pain relief when compared to typical joint injections.

It is very important to remember that this treatment does not work for everybody with lower back pain. Your doctor will make a decision on whether you should be tested with a medial branch block based on your signs and symptoms.

RF treatments can be repeated as required, if the pain returns. Further treatments can be discussed with your doctor.