

# arizonapain<sup>®</sup>treatmentcenters

1301 E. McDowell Rd., Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85006

5656 S. Power Rd., Suite 139, Gilbert, AZ 85295

Phone: (602) 265-8800 Fax: (602) 265-8151



## Radiofrequency Neurotomy for Joint Pain

A radiofrequency neurotomy is a type of procedure in which a heat lesion is created on certain nerves with the goal of interrupting the pain signals to the brain, thus eliminating pain.

A *medial branch neurotomy* affects the nerves carrying pain from the facet joints, and a *lateral branch neurotomy* affects nerves that carry pain from the sacroiliac joints. These medial or lateral branch nerves do not control any muscles or sensation in the arms or legs so there is no danger of negatively affecting those areas.

Before this procedure is undertaken, the joints and branch nerves will have already been proven to be the source of pain through diagnostic nerve block or facet injections. Success rates vary, but typically about 30% to 50% of patients undergoing this procedure will experience significant pain relief for as much as two years. Of the remaining patients, about 50% will get some pain relief for a shorter period. Some patients do not experience any relief from pain as a result of this procedure. After a period of time, however, the nerve will regenerate and the pain may return.

### **Radiofrequency neurotomy procedure**

As with many spinal injections, radiofrequency neurotomy is best performed under fluoroscopy (live x-ray) for guidance in properly targeting and placing the needle. On the day of the injection, patients are advised to avoid driving and avoid doing any strenuous activities. The entire procedure usually takes between 30 and 60 minutes.

### **Radiofrequency neurotomy results and follow-up**

On the day after the procedure, the patient may cautiously return to regular activities. The neck or back will usually be very sore during the next one to four days. This pain is usually caused by muscle spasms and irritability while the targeted nerves are dying from the heat lesion over the next seven to fourteen days. Pain relief will typically not be experienced until about four to six weeks after the procedure. On occasion, the back or neck may feel odd or slightly weak for several weeks after the procedure. The nerves will eventually grow back (regenerate), but the patient's pain may or may not recur. If the pain does recur, the procedure can be repeated.

### **Common concerns about radiofrequency neurotomy**

Patients are frequently concerned that, without the ability to feel sensation through these nerves, they may cause an injury to either the joints or the back. There is no scientific evidence to support this happening. In the many years that neurotomies have been performed, this has not been found to occur. Another concern is that by damaging nerves, pain will be caused rather than relieved. There is a small chance (less than 5%) that the pain will worsen after the procedure.

### **Potential complications of radiofrequency neurotomy**

As with all medical procedures, there are certain risks and potential complications associate with a radiofrequency neurotomy. Complications are rare with this procedure, but may occur and include:

- Pain or discomfort around the injection site
- Numbness of skin covering the injection site
- Worsened pain due to muscle spasm in the area of the injection
- Permanent nerve pain
- Allergies or reactions to medications used
- Infection