



**Pain Specialists
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Medial Branch Block Neurotomy/Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA) Information

What is a Medial Branch Block Neurotomy and why is it helpful?

A medial branch neurotomy is a non surgical procedure which lesions (burns) the nerves carrying pain from your facet joints to your brain. We will numb your nerves as a “test” to see if you were a candidate for the neurotomy procedure. The neurotomy prevents pain signal from traveling through these nerves, thereby interrupting the pain signal to your brain. These medial branch nerves do not control any muscles or sensations in your arms or legs. The medial branch nerves do control small muscles in your neck, mid, or lower back, but a neurotomy will not permanently harm these muscles. If effective, the treatment should provide pain relief lasting at least 9-14 months and at times much longer or permanently.

What will happen to me during the procedure?

An IV will be started and you will be taken to the procedure room where you will lie face down on the table. We will give you some IV sedation prior to the procedure for comfort and relaxation. Next the physician will numb the small area of skin and x-ray guidance to direct a special needle along side the medial branch nerves. A small amount of electrical current will then be carefully passed through each needle to assure it is only next to the target nerve. This may briefly recreate your usual pain and may cause a muscle twitch in your neck or back. The nerves will then be numbed to prevent pain while the nerve is being lesioned. This process usually takes between 30 – 90 minutes.

What should I expect after the procedure?

On the day of the injection you should not drive and you should avoid any strenuous activities. On the day after the procedure, you may cautiously try to return to your regular activities, but most patients rest for an additional 1 to 2 days. Your neck or back will usually be very sore during the next several weeks. This pain is usually caused by muscle spasms and irritability while the procedure takes effect. The physician will give you some medicine for the expected pain. Pain relief usually is not experienced until about 3 weeks after the procedure when the nerves have completely died. On occasion, your back or neck may feel odd or slightly weak for several weeks after the procedure.

The nerves will eventually grow back (regenerate) but the pain may or may not return. If the pain does return, you may want to have the procedure repeated (usually with equal success. Some patients never have a return of their pain, but we cannot predict when this will occur.

There is a rare chance (less than 5%) that you have increased nerve pain following the procedure for 1 – 3 months. This may include skin sensitivity or a sunburn sensation. It is treated with specific medications and usually resolves within several months. Increased nerve pain, however, is very common and to be expected following neurotomy at the 2-3 cervical level of the neck. Symptoms include burning, itching, and surface sensitivity in the skin behind the ear and base of the skull. These symptoms usually resolve in 3 to 5 weeks.