



PATIENT TEACHING HANDOUT

Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA); Rhizotomy Procedure

A rhizotomy is a procedure in which radiofrequency waves are used to interrupt the nerves that transmit pain from the facet joints of the spine.

Why is a rhizotomy performed?

A rhizotomy is performed to stop the facet nerves from sending pain signals from the facet joints. The goal is to reduce or eliminate your pain for months, and possibly for years, and to improve your function.

How do I prepare for this procedure?

- You are not permitted to drive after the procedure, so you must arrange with someone to drive you home or the procedure will be cancelled.
- Please tell your doctor before your procedure is scheduled if you are taking any anticoagulants (blood-thinning medications). Then, follow these instructions:
- Starting 7 days before your procedure, do not take any Aspirin-products, unless prescribed by your doctor.
- Starting 3 days before your procedure, do not take any nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) such as Ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil), Naproxen (Aleve), Meloxicam (Mobic), Etodolac (Lodine), etc.
- The day of your procedure, you may eat a light meal.
- The day of your procedure, you may take your pain medications, muscle relaxants, and nerve medications, UNLESS they contain blood-thinning properties.
- Please call 412-533-2202 to cancel your appointment if you have a fever, the flu, a cold, or another infection.
- Your doctor may prescribe a sedative medication to keep you comfortable during the procedure.

What happens during the procedure?

- You will be lying flat so that the area of your pain is exposed.
- The area will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution and the skin over the injection area will be numbed.
- The doctor will use x-ray and ultrasound guidance to place thin needles in the area involved.
- A radiofrequency machine will be used to interrupt the facet nerves.

How long does the procedure take?

- The procedure usually takes about 1 hour.

What complications might occur?

Complications are rare following this procedure. Complications that may occur include:

- mild bleeding problems, and/or bruising
- soreness at the site of needle placement
- nerve irritation
- infection (rare)

What happens after the procedure?

- After the procedure, you will be taken back to your exam room to recover for a short time.
- A staff member will monitor your blood pressure and pulse.
- A staff member will review your discharge instructions with you.
- Some people have muscle spasms after this procedure. If you have muscle spasms, tell your doctor.
- It may take as long as 3 to 6 weeks for you to notice any pain relief after the procedure.
- You will likely be ordered physical therapy 3-6 weeks following this procedure.
- You will be scheduled for a follow-up visit in 2 to 3 weeks after the procedure.

If you have any questions about this procedure or your pain control, call Pittsburgh Pain Physicians at 412-533-2202.

