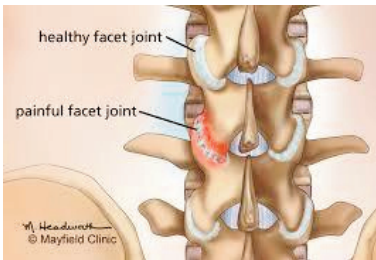
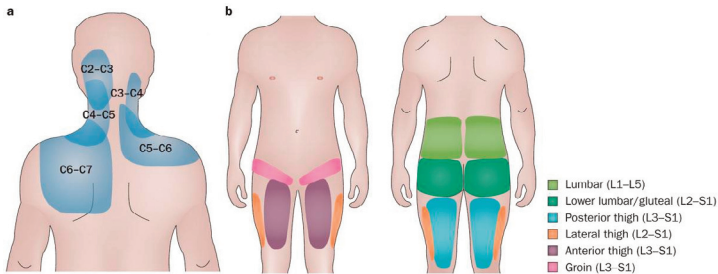


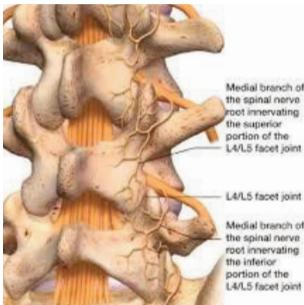
# Medial Branch Block and Radiofrequency Ablation



## What is a Facet Joint?

Facet Joints (Zygapophysial joints) are joints on either side of your spine that allow for movement of your neck and back. When these joints are strained due to trauma or degenerated the joints can become a source of neck and back pain.

Pain from the facets in the neck can be referred to the head, back and shoulders. Pain from the facets in the back may be referred to the buttock, hamstring, groin and legs.



## What is a Medial Branch Block?

A diagnostic procedure done to block the small nerves of the neck and back connected to specific facet joints. Typically several levels are injected during one procedure. If you experience marked pain relief (>80%) the day of the injection, then the facet joints are determined to be the source of the pain.

Medial branch blocks are performed twice to confirm the correct diagnosis and the correct levels. If

you get significant relief on both occasions, you would be considered a good candidate for the radiofrequency ablation procedure. (RFA)

The procedure is primarily diagnostic, meaning that if you get the appropriate response following the procedure, then you may be a candidate for a subsequent procedure called a radiofrequency ablation.

## **What is a Radiofrequency Ablation?**

A Procedure done after 2 successful diagnostic medial branch blocks. (>80% relief on 2 separate occasions) RFA's use radio-magnetic waves to "burn" and stop transmitting pain signals from the facet joints to the brain. A fluoroscope (X-ray) is used to guide special needles to the correct location. Testing is then done to confirm the correct placement of the needle. The area is then anesthetized and the procedure is then completed.

## **Why is this done?**

To reduce back and neck pain, improve flexibility and enhance function and quality of life.

## **How long should it last?**

The RFA should last >6 months and can get repeated twice per year.

## **How to Prepare before the Procedure:**

You will have a consultation with the doctor to determine if you are a candidate for the injection. They will review the risks and benefits of the planned procedure. At the consultation, any questions you may have will be answered. Potential side effects of the medial branch block/RFA's include, but are not limited to:

- infection
- bleeding
- headache
- facial flushing (if steroid was used)
- temporary leg weakness
- temporary increase in pain

## **You must let your doctor know if you have any bleeding disorders or are using any blood thinners.**

These include but are not limited to:

- Aspirin
- Coumadin (Warfarin)
- Plavix (Clopidogrel)
- Ticlid (Ticlopidine)
- Heparin
- Lovenox (Enoxaparin)
- Fragmin (Dalteparin)
- Aggrenox (Depyridamole)
- Effient (Prasugrel)

- Pradaxa (Dabigatran)
- Eliquis (Apixaban)
- NSAIDS (Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Diclofenac, Ketoralac, Meloxicam, Celebrex, Piroxicam etc)
- Herbal remedies or Vitamins

If you are unsure if a medication thins your blood, please call your physician/nurses line to ask. A clearance may be necessary from your primary care physician, neurologist, hematologist/oncologist or cardiologist prior to having the injection, to ensure your safety prior to stopping any of your medications. You will then be instructed on when to stop the medication prior to the injection

## **DO NOT STOP THE MEDICATION ON YOUR OWN**

You must let your doctor know if you have had any fevers, are on antibiotics or had any recent hospitalization or infections within the last 4 weeks.

### **The day of the procedure**

- You have the option of sedation during your procedure. This is a twilight anesthesia, and you may not be completely asleep. During the RFA the doctor will need to ask you questions and will need you awake to respond. Regardless, you will be monitored by an anesthesiologist/nurse anesthetist during your procedure.
- If you choose to receive sedation, you will be asked to fast for 6-8 hours prior to the procedure. You will also be required to have someone 18 years or older to drive you home.
- If you are diabetic, we will check your blood sugar levels on the day of your procedure. It must be in an acceptable range to proceed as steroids may increase your blood sugars.
- An IV will be placed on all patients and necessary paperwork will be signed. The site of injection will then be confirmed and marked by the doctor.

### **During the procedure**

- You will be asked to position yourself on the X-Ray table. A local anesthetic will be injected into the skin and underlying tissue to help with the initial discomfort of the needles.
- Once the local anesthetic is working, the needles are advanced using bones as landmarks and the x-ray machine to ensure the needle is in the right place.
- When the needles are in place and confirmed, the medication will then be injected.

If getting a RFA, the doctor will ask you questions during the procedure to make sure the needles are in the right location. (ie Do you feel any pain going down your arms/legs) Once confirmed, more local anesthetic will be injected and the needles will then be heated to the appropriate temperature for the indicated amount of time. This should not be painful.

## After the procedure

- A bandage will be placed over the injection sites.
- The medial branch block will take 5-10 minutes, the RFA will take about 15-20 minutes and you will be monitored in a recovery room for an additional 10-15 minutes following.
- A nurse will check your vitals and discuss discharge instructions.
- Pain relief should last for at least 6-8 hours following the procedure. The steroid may take anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks to take effect.
- The RFA may cause you to have increased pain for a couple of days prior to relief.

## Discharge Instructions

Do Not drive or operate machinery for at least 24 hours

You may resume a normal diet

Do Not participate in any strenuous activity during the day of your injection

You may shower, but do not take a bath or sit in a hot tub for at least 24 hours

If taking blood thinners, you may restart them that night or the following morning depending on clearance from physician, if unsure please ask.



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