

# WHAT IS RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION?



Radiofrequency ablation is an advanced pain management technique that can treat a variety of pain syndromes. The most common use of radiofrequency ablation is in the cervical and lumbar spine where the procedure is employed to reduce pain from arthritic joints. Radiofrequency ablation is a technique that employs heat to disable the pain-transmitting nerves in the spine.

The procedure is very safe and is only used on sensory nerves that transmit pain impulses. There is no risk of paralysis or weakness from this procedure. There is also another type of radiofrequency ablation called “pulsed” radiofrequency ablation. This procedure does not use heat to disable the nerve, and is appropriate for treating a wide variety of pain problems that originate in the sensory nerves.

## ■ HOW DOES RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION RELIEVE PAIN?

Radiofrequency ablation uses heat to disable the pain-transmitting nerves in the spine. The process is analogous to microwave ovens that use microwave energy to heat food. Radiofrequency energy is transmitted to the tip of a needle where it is converted to heat, which is applied directly to the nerve fibers. Once the nerves undergo this heat treatment, they slowly stop transmitting pain.

## ■ WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THIS PROCEDURE?

After checking in for the procedure, a full history will be taken and an IV will be started. You will then be seen by a member of the Colorado Pain Care team prior to the procedure, at which time will have the opportunity to have all your questions answered. After being placed on the treatment table, intravenous sedation may be administered to make the procedure as comfortable as possible. The injection usually takes only several minutes. Following the procedure, you will be allowed

to rest for approximately 30 minutes in the recovery area prior to discharge. You must have a responsible adult take you home.

## ■ WHEN WILL I BEGIN TO FEEL PAIN RELIEF AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

With the use of heat to disable the nerve, it may take one to two weeks for the pain-reducing effects of the procedure to occur. Within four weeks you can expect to experience the highest level of pain relief that can be achieved in your individual situation.

## ■ WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED RECOVERY FROM THE PROCEDURE?

Most patients have minimal difficulties with the procedure. However, a small percentage of patients may develop neuralgia, or nerve pain, at the procedure site, especially in the cervical spine. These symptoms usually resolve. If you continue to have symptoms, please refer to the discharge instructions. You may also call Colorado Pain Care if there are any concerns.

**Sedation Guidelines:** If you choose to receive conscious sedation, you cannot have anything to eat for six hours prior to the procedure. You may have clear liquids (water, apple juice, clear tea, black coffee without cream and sugar) up to two hours prior to your procedure. You may take routine medications the day of your procedure. You must also have a responsible adult (over the age of 18) accompany you to your procedure in order to assume your care upon discharge.