

# Radiofrequency Ablation

## What is it?

- Radiofrequency ablation (RFA) is a procedure used to manage certain types of chronic pain. It uses electrical energy to create heat. The heat damages a small area of nerve tissue causing the pain signals coming from a specific nerve area to become interrupted.

## What to do before the procedure

- Review the handout called 'Pre-Procedure Instructions for Fluoroscopy'.
- If you take any anticoagulant/antiplatelet (blood thinner) medications, you must discuss this with your pain specialist well before the procedure date because these types of medications have to be stopped prior to performing RFA in order to prevent serious bleeding from occurring. There are several types of blood thinner medications and when exactly to stop the medication depends on the type of blood thinner medication taken.

## What to expect during the procedure

- RFA is performed using a fluoroscopy (live x-ray) machine and takes between 20 to 60 minutes depending on how many and which nerves are being treated.
- You will lie on your stomach on the procedure table. A cold sticky pad will be placed on your skin so that the electrical current can flow back into the radiofrequency machine.
- The area to be injected will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution.
- During the procedure, a needle is guided into position and once placed in the correct treatment area, a small current is sent by radiofrequency through the electrode to cauterize (burn) the tissue by heating it. You should feel minimal to no discomfort or pain during the procedure.
- Complications are rare, but no procedure is completely free of risk. There is a small risk of infection, bleeding, damage to tissue surrounding the injection site, and nerve damage.

## What to expect after the procedure

- The RFA treated area will usually be very sore for 1-4 days after the procedure and increased pain may persist for 2-4 weeks before improvements are noted.
- Pain relief from RFA usually happens when the nerves have completely died. This usually happens 2-3 weeks after the procedure, but can take up to 12 weeks. On average we anticipate 8 to 10 months of pain intensity reduction. Pain returns as the nerves grow back and the procedure may need to be repeated.

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