

Lumbar Facet Radio-Frequency Ablation

A lumbar facet radio-frequency ablation (RFA) is intended to provide pain relief by blocking the pain signals that the nerves joints send to the brain. This procedure is reserved for those who have already had at least one or two injections (medial branch blocks) and have identified the exact source of their pain.

Conditions treated

You may benefit from a lumbar facet radio-frequency ablation (RFA) if you suffer from:

- **Spondylolisthesis**
- **Lumbar Facet Syndrome**
- **Spondylosis**
- **Chronic low back pain**
- **Whiplash**

Duration

45 minutes

How is it performed?

Prior to the steroid injection, you will be positioned on your stomach. The site of the injection will be cleansed and local anesthetic will be used to numb the injection site. Under the guidance of fluoroscopic x-ray, your physician will insert a needle with an electrode at the tip alongside the nerves to the facet joint. Using radiofrequency, the electrode is heated and cauterizes the nerve ending, which blocks the pain signals from reaching the brain. Each joint has two nerves, so this will need to be done twice or perhaps more depending on the number of sites to be treated. Your vital signs will be monitored for the duration of the procedure.

Prior to your procedure

You should continue taking all medications except blood thinners before the procedure. Please see your medication handout to know when to hold and resume these medications.

What are some of the risks and side effects?

This procedure is a relatively safe, non-surgical treatment, with minimal risks of complications. Some of the most common or possible side effects are:

- Weakness that may or may not be permanent
- Neuroma
- Numbness
- Infection
- Increased pain
- Lack of pain relief

It is important to be sure that your treating physician has a current list of allergies and medications to help reduce risks during the procedure. Any and all side effects from the procedure should present within the first 24 hours following the procedure.

What to expect after the procedure

Most patients are able to return to their normal activities the day after the procedure. You may experience some soreness, bruising or swelling at the injection site, which may be eased with ice and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). This can last up to 3 weeks, but typically resolves within a week.

You should not drive or engage in physical activity for 24 hours following the procedure.

You should resume all medications and regular eating habits immediately. Please see your medication handout for instructions on resuming blood thinners or ask your doctor.

You should call your doctor if you experience a fever over 101 within 72 hours of the procedure.

