

THORACIC RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION

for chronic upper and mid back pain

What is a thoracic radiofrequency ablation (RFA) ?

A thoracic radiofrequency ablation is an outpatient procedure for treating upper and middle back pain. Also called thoracic facet thermal coagulation or rhizotomy.

What are thoracic facet joints?

Facet joints connect the vertebrae, the bones of the spine which help guide your spine when you move. The section of your spine between your neck and lower back is called the thoracic region which contains twelve vertebrae.

Facet joints are the size of a thumbnail and are found on both sides of the spine. Thoracic facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. Medial branch nerves are found near facet joints and communicate pain from the fact joint telling the brain when facet joints have been injured.

What is thoracic facet joint pain?

You may feel pain if a thoracic facet joint is injured which may feel like muscle tension or severe pain.

The cartilage inside the joint may be injured or only connecting ligaments surrounding the joint are injured.

Facet pain also depends on which facet joint is affected. Thoracic facet pain can occur in an area from your upper back and shoulder down to your hips.

How do I know if I have thoracic facet pain?

If you have pain in one or more of these areas and it lasts longer than two months, you may have thoracic facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRI's may not always show if a facet joint is causing pain. The best way to diagnose facet pain is to block the pain signal in a medial branch nerve with a local anesthetic.

What is a thoracic RFA?

RFA uses radiofrequency energy to disrupt nerve function. When this is done to a thoracic medial branch nerve, the nerve can no longer transmit pain from an injured facet joint.

What happens during an RFA?

A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle near the facet joint. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, must be used to ensure the safe and proper position of the needle. The doctor will make sure it's at the correct nerve stimulating it. This may cause muscle twitching and provoke some of your pain.

After the needle is placed, the nerve will be numbed. Radiofrequency energy will then be used to disrupt the medial branch nerve. This is often repeated at more than one level of the spine.

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How long can I expect pain relief?

Nerves regenerate after RFA and the length of time it takes can vary. Your pain may or may not return when the nerves regenerate. If the pain comes back, another RFA can be done.

This information is for general education only. Specific questions or concerns should always be discussed with your doctor.