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PROCEDURE OVERVIEW

Radiofrequency Neuro Ablation

Radiofrequency neuro ablation or neurotomy is intended to decrease or stop pain originating from the facet joints of your neck and spine. It is usually performed after you have demonstrated pain relief from a "test" injection such as a facet joint or medial branch block injection.

During the procedure, an electrode is inserted in the area near the irritated nerve in the facet joint. The electrode heats up a small area of nerve tissue, decreasing pain signals from that specific area. A radiofrequency neuro ablation can be performed on your neck, back, coccyx or sacrum areas and can provide pain relief for about one year. The degree and length of relief will vary with each patient. Although uncommon, risks may include increased pain, infection and bleeding.

PREPARATION

Getting Ready for Your Procedure

To get ready for the procedure, you will need to do the following:

• Tell your doctor the medications and herbal supplements you take, be sure to include aspirin and other over the counter medications. Ask whether you should stop taking any of your medications before the procedure. Refer to the medication form available at your clinic.

• Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or if you have any allergies, especially to medications, iodine or shellfish.

• If asked, bring x-rays, MRIs or other tests with you on the day of your treatment.

• For your protection, do not eat any food for at least 6 hours before your arrival time. You may drink clear liquids such as tea, black coffee, clear soda, clear juices (such as apple or cranberry) or water up to 2 hours before your arrival time but please do not drink any full liquids such as milk, orange or grapefruit juices.

The Day of the Procedure

The procedure is performed in a hospital or outpatient surgery center.

• You may be examined by your physician and/or the nurses in the facility.

• You may be given an IV (intravenous) line for fluids or sedation medication.

THE PROCEDURE

In the Procedure Room:

You will lie on an exam table on your stomach or side. It is important to stay as still as you can.

• The skin over the injection site will be cleaned with cold soap. This may or may not be the same area where your pain is located.

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• The doctor will numb the skin with a local anesthetic.

• Fluoroscopy (x-ray imaging) will be used to help your doctor see where the injection needs to go. A contrast "dye" will be injected into the region to help obtain a better image.

• The electrode will be placed next to the facet joint nerves and the area around the nerves will be gently warmed using radio waves.

POST PROCEDURE

After the Procedure

You can usually go home in about 30 minutes. You will need to have a responsible driver if you are planning to have sedation for the procedure. When the anesthetic wears off, you may feel more sore than usual - this is normal.

In most cases, you will have more soreness for one week after the procedure. You will need to rest, use ice packs and take any other medications that your physician may have given you. It may take up to one month for you to feel the full effect of the procedure.

Ask your doctor when it is okay to return to work. Your doctor will advise you when to schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss the results of your procedure.