

The Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation

Radiofrequency denervation of facet joints

Information for patients

This leaflet will give you information about **radiofrequency denervation for chronic pain** relief. If you have any questions, please speak to your GP or other relevant healthcare professional.

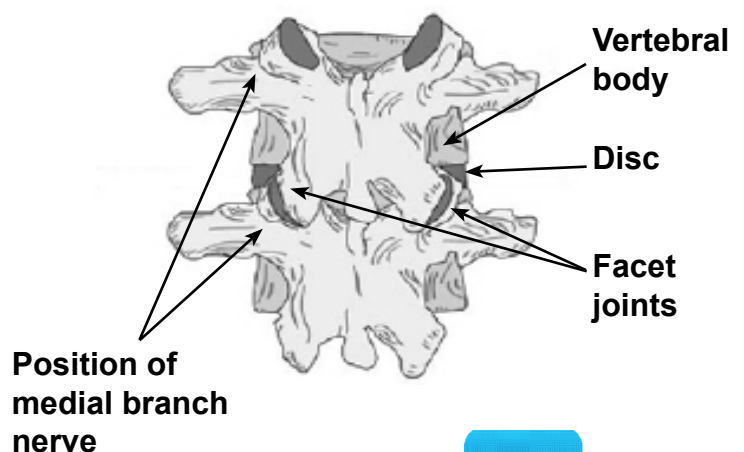
What are facet joints?

Facet joints are small linking joints that connect the bones of the spine, also known as vertebrae. They work with the discs, and are responsible for controlling the twisting and sideways movements of the whole spine. Facet joints are found on each side of the spine.

Usually these joints cause no pain at all, however if they become inflamed or arthritic (also known as 'wear and tear') they can become painful.

What is radiofrequency denervation?

Radiofrequency denervation is a procedure where the nerve fibres supplying painful facet joints, are selectively destroyed by heat. This heat is produced by radio waves delivered through an electrode, using the tip of a heated needle.



Why am I having this procedure?

Before radiofrequency denervation is considered, you will have already had a test block of the nerves supplying your facet joints to confirm your diagnosis (medial branch blocks). This treatment has given you some relief that was thought to be significant by you and your doctor, but it has worn off.

Radiofrequency treatment can last much longer than injections. Unfortunately it does not always work as well as we would like. If the relief you had from the medial branch blocks was good, the chances are that radiofrequency treatment will be as effective, but this cannot be guaranteed.

What happens during the procedure?

Radiofrequency denervation is carried out as a day case procedure (you can go home on the same day). The procedure is carried out in one of the theatres in Day Surgery to minimise your risk of getting an infection. Shortly before your procedure you will be asked to change in to a theatre gown.

The procedure

- The procedure is carried out under x-ray. This allows the doctor to see the specific level to be treated. **It is important that you tell your consultant if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, as x-rays may harm your baby.**
- A self-adhesive foil plate will be placed on your thigh; this is connected to the radiofrequency machine to make an electric circuit.
- You will be asked to lie down on your front. Once you are laying in the correct position, your doctor will prepare the area with an antiseptic solution which may feel cold.
- A cannula (a small flexible plastic tube) will be inserted in to the vein in the back of your hand. You may be given something to make you sleepy.
- A local anaesthetic is injected at the site of the procedure. This may sting to start with, before your skin goes numb.
- It is important that you keep still during your procedure, as a special hollow needle will be carefully inserted under x-ray control in to the correct position.
- The correct position of the probe is checked by two tests:
 - sensory: you may feel tightness, pressure, or tingling in your back; and
 - motor: you may feel some throbbing in your back.
- You must report sensations accurately and promptly when asked. If there is throbbing in your leg/arm or you have got no sensations on the tests the probe will be repositioned.
- The machine will then be set to lesion the nerve by heating it for about one and half minutes. During this time you may feel some pain at the site of the procedure.
- The above may be repeated at different levels on your spine.
- After the probe is removed, local anaesthetic and possibly steroids are injected to relieve any discomfort you are feeling following your procedure.

What are the possible side effects?

- There may be some **pain and bruising** at the needle site.
- You may have some **bleeding** from the needle site.
- You may **feel a little unsteady** when you first stand.
- The procedure may **make your pain worse**. This should settle within one month.
- There is a small risk of **infection** at the site of your injections.
- You may feel some **leg weakness or numbness**, which should settle within a few hours.
- Very rarely, there is a risk of temporary or permanent **nerve damage**.

If steroids are used:

- Female patients may have temporary irregular periods.
- Diabetic patients may have unstable blood sugar levels.
- Rarely, some patients may have mood changes.

What will happen after my injections?

- A small dressing will be used to cover the injection sites. This can be removed after 24 hours. Do not worry if it falls off sooner.
- You will be discharged home one to two hours after your procedure.
- You must not drive for 24 hours following your procedure; please arrange for someone to drive you home from the hospital. We also strongly recommend that you have someone stay at home with you until the following day.
- You may notice an immediate improvement, but this improvement can be delayed for a few days or weeks. Sometimes there may be a slight increase in pain. Steroids work slowly, so even if your procedure has worked well, nothing may seem to happen for several days. It can sometimes take several weeks before you notice the benefits from radiofrequency denervation.

Will I need a follow-up appointment?

A telephone appointment will be made for a nurse to call you about three months after your procedure. You will be told by letter of the date and time of this appointment. The nurse will review the outcome of your procedure, so they can plan what happens next and discuss this with you during your telephone appointment.

If you continue to have good benefit from the procedure, you may be discharged from the Pain Clinic.

Further information

If you have any concerns regarding the information in this leaflet or your procedure, please phone the Pain Clinic.

Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation (direct lines)

- Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury Telephone: 01227 78 30 49
- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate Telephone: 01843 23 50 94
- William Harvey Hospital, Ashford Telephone: 01233 61 66 91

Useful information

- Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Royal College of Anaesthetists. Information sheet for adult patients undergoing: Facet Joint Rhizolysis/Radio Frequency Lesioning (Denervation) for the treatment of pain.
Web: fpm.ac.uk/sites/fpm/files/documents/2019-11/FPM-PIL-Denerv-radio-freq-Sep-2019-ed.pdf
- East Kent Hospitals. The Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation: medial branch blocks
Web: www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/chronic-pain-leaflets
- East Kent Hospitals. The Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation: medial branch blocks (fast-track denervation pathway)
Web: www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/chronic-pain-leaflets
- East Kent Hospitals. Chronic pain patient information
Web: www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/chronic-pain-leaflets

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation