

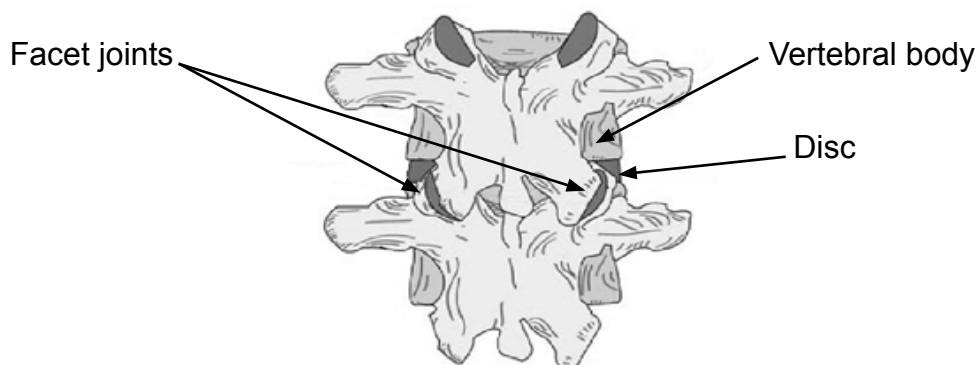
The Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation: radiofrequency denervation of facet joints

Information for patients

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

What are facet joints?

Facet joints are small linking joints that connect the bones of the spine, also known as vertebrae. They work together with the discs, and are responsible for controlling the twisting and sideways movements of the whole back. The facet joints are found on each side of the spine. Usually they cause no pain at all. However if they become inflamed or arthritic, often called 'wear and tear', they can then become painful.



What is radiofrequency denervation?

Radiofrequency denervation is a procedure in which 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 offered you a degree of 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 can not be guaranteed.

What happens during the procedure?

Radiofrequency denervation is carried out as a day case procedure, in one of the theatres in Day Surgery to minimize infection risks. Shortly before your procedure you will be asked to change into a theatre gown.

The procedure

- The procedure is carried out under x-ray screening, which allows the doctor to see the specific level to be treated. **You must tell your consultant if there is any chance 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 lying in the correct position the doctor will prepare the area to be treated with an antiseptic solution, which may feel cold.
- A cannula (a small flexible plastic tube) will be inserted into 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 into 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 into 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.
- This process may be repeated at different levels on your spine.
- After the probe is removed local anaesthetic and possibly steroids are injected to relieve discomfort 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 resolve within one month.
- There is a small risk of infection at the site of the injections.
- You may experience some leg weakness or numbness, this should resolve over a few hours.
- Very rarely, there is a risk of temporary or permanent nerve damage.

If steroids are used

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

What will happen after the injections?

A small dressing will be placed over the injection sites, which 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 may notice an immediate improvement but this can be delayed for a few days or even weeks. Sometimes there may actually be slightly increased 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.

Can I drive straight away?

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 who can stay at home with you until the following day.

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 your appointment.

The nurse will review the outcome of your procedure, to plan what happens next. They will discuss this with you during your telephone appointment. If you have had good benefit from the procedure that is continuing, you may be discharged from the Pain Clinic.

For further information

If after reading this information you have any questions, please contact the Pain Clinic.

Kent Centre for Pain Medicine and Neuromodulation (direct line)

- 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

For further information on facet joint medial branch blocks and to see a list of other East Kent Hospitals pain leaflets, please see the links below.

- 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.**
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** 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)** www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/chronic-pain-leaflets
- East Kent Hospitals. **Chronic pain patient information** 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