



150 West Peachtree Avenue • Foley, Alabama 36535

Phone (251) 291-2311

Fax (888) 894-5212

www.coastal-spine.com

RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION

Patient education and discharge instructions

WHAT IS RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION?

Radiofrequency ablation (also called radiofrequency neurotomy) uses a controlled amount of heat to disable the small nerves that carry pain signals from an arthritic joint, most often the facet joints of the spine or the sacroiliac joint. It is performed after diagnostic nerve blocks have shown that these nerves are the source of your pain.

Using x-ray guidance, the physician places special needles next to the targeted nerves. Before treating each nerve, a small electrical test confirms that the needle is in a safe position away from the nerves that control movement. The area is numbed, and radio waves then heat the tip of each needle to create a small treatment area on the nerve. The procedure typically takes 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of nerves treated.

BEFORE YOUR PROCEDURE

- Read the handout **Preparing for Your Procedure**.
- **You must have an adult driver.** If you receive IV sedation, your driver must stay during the procedure and drive you home. Follow the fasting rules for IV sedation.
- **Tell us if you have a pacemaker, defibrillator, spinal cord stimulator, or any other implanted electrical device.** Special precautions are required.
- **Blood thinners:** we will tell you whether you need to stop your blood thinner and for how long. Never stop a blood thinner unless we have told you to and the prescribing doctor has approved it.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

- **Rest for the remainder of the day.** You may resume light normal activity the next day. Avoid strenuous activity, heavy lifting, and vigorous exercise for 2 to 3 days.
- **Driving:** do not drive, drink alcohol, or sign important documents for 24 hours.
- **Bandages:** remove the bandages the next day. You may shower; do not soak in a tub, pool, or hot tub for 48 hours.
- **Diet and medications:** resume your normal diet and your regular medications. If you stopped a blood thinner, restart it the day after the procedure unless you were told otherwise.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Soreness is common.** Many patients have increased soreness, muscle spasm, or a burning or sunburn-like feeling over the treated area for 1 to 3 weeks. This is a normal part of healing.

Coastal Spine & Pain, LLC

Richard T. Webb, M.D., J.D., LL.M. Rachael Arredondo, FNP-C

- Apply ice or a cold pack wrapped in a thin towel for 15 to 20 minutes several times a day for the first 2 to 3 days. After that, you may use ice or gentle heat, whichever helps more.
- You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol). You may also take ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve) if your doctor allows these and you are not taking a blood thinner.
- Some patients notice a small patch of numb, tingling, or sensitive skin near the treatment site. This usually improves over several weeks.
- **Relief takes time.** Full benefit usually develops over 2 to 4 weeks. Relief commonly lasts 6 to 12 months or longer. Because the nerves gradually regrow, the procedure can be repeated if your pain returns.

REPORTING YOUR RELIEF

Please keep track of your pain on a 0 to 10 scale and bring your record to your follow-up visit, usually scheduled 4 to 6 weeks after the procedure. Insurance plans require documentation of how much relief you had and how long it lasted before they will approve a repeat procedure.

RISKS

Radiofrequency ablation is generally safe. Risks include bleeding, infection, temporary increased pain, skin numbness or sensitivity, and, rarely, nerve injury or weakness.

WHEN TO CALL US

Call our office right away if you have:

- Redness, warmth, swelling, drainage, or increasing tenderness at the injection site
- A fever of 101°F or higher, or chills
- A severe headache that is worse when you sit or stand up and better when you lie down
- New or increasing numbness, tingling, or weakness in your arms or legs that does not go away within several hours
- Severe or rapidly worsening pain
- Pain that is steadily getting worse after the first week rather than slowly improving

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you have:

- Weakness, paralysis, or inability to move your arms or legs
- Loss of control of your bladder or bowels
- Chest pain or difficulty breathing
- Signs of a severe allergic reaction, such as swelling of the face or throat, hives, or trouble breathing

Questions or Concerns

Call Coastal Spine & Pain at **(251) 291-2311**, Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

CSP-PT-PROC-05 | Revised September 2026