



# Understanding Radiofrequency Ablation for Facet Joint Pain

Facet joints are small joints located in pairs on the back of the spine. Medial branch nerves are the tiny nerve branches that communicate pain caused by these joints. If you have had a temporary response to an initial and a confirmatory medial branch block, your physician may recommend a radiofrequency ablation for treatment. This procedure involves delivering a precise heat lesion or “burn” to the medial branch nerve so that it does not effectively transmit pain from the facet joint, resulting in decreased pain and increased function.

## What is Radiofrequency Ablation?

Radiofrequency ablation is a minimally invasive medical procedure that uses heat to destroy targeted tissue. In pain management, radiofrequency ablation targets specific nerves. The heat generated disrupts the nerve’s function, preventing it from transmitting pain signals to the brain. This can provide long-term pain relief for chronic pain conditions, especially in the back, neck, and arthritic joints, when other methods haven’t been successful.

## The Benefits of Radiofrequency Ablation

Radiofrequency ablation targets the nerves that transmit pain signals from the facet joints in your spine. The goal is to disrupt the function of specific medial branch nerves that supply sensation to the facet joints.

Radiofrequency ablation offers several benefits, particularly for those experiencing chronic back pain:

- **Long-Term Pain Relief:** While the pain relief from radiofrequency ablation is not permanent, it can offer significant pain relief for extended periods compared to injections.
- **Minimally Invasive:** Radiofrequency ablation results in less scarring and quicker recovery than surgery.
- **Outpatient Procedure:** We can perform radiofrequency ablation on an outpatient basis.

## The Radiofrequency Ablation Procedure

- An IV may be started so that relaxation medication can be given.
- You will lie face down on a procedure table.
- The physician will use fluoroscopic (X-ray) guidance to visualize the spine.
- The physician will scrub your skin with sterile soap, place a drape on your back, and numb an area of skin with anesthetic medication.
- After the anesthetic has been given time to be effective, the physician will then direct a special needle using fluoroscopic guidance towards the medial branch nerve.
- After the needle is in its proper location, your physician will inject a small amount of anesthetic medication and then “burn” the medial branch nerve for ninety seconds.
- This procedure may be repeated at one more level, depending on the location of your typical pain.

## Pre-Op and Post-Op Instructions

### Before the Procedure

- You will be scheduled at one of our convenient locations, listed below, where you will be for approximately 1-1.5 hours total.
- You will be required to have a responsible adult drive you home.
- You should take your routine medications (i.e., blood pressure and diabetic medications) on the day of your procedure.
- If you are taking a blood thinner and are having a cervical procedure, please notify the office immediately.
- You must not eat any food six hours before your appointment.
- You may have sips of clear liquids up to two hours before your appointment.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing to your appointment.

### After the Procedure

Immediately after the procedure, you will go to a recovery area where you will be monitored for approximately 15-30 minutes. Of note, depending on the area treated, the arm(s), chest wall, or legs(s) may feel weak or numb for up to several hours after the procedure. You will not be allowed to drive on the day of the procedure.

You may return to your normal activities the day after your procedure, including returning to work.

### Location of Procedures

#### [Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Phoenix Office](#)

3700 N. 24th Street  
Suite 210  
Phoenix, AZ 85016

#### [Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Mesa Office](#)

6634 E. Baseline Rd.  
Suite 101  
Mesa, AZ 85206

#### [Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Scottsdale Office](#)

8670 E. Shea Blvd.  
Suite 102  
Scottsdale, AZ 85260

#### [Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Peoria Office](#)

13128 N. 94th Drive  
Suite 200  
Peoria, AZ 85381

#### [Desert Spine and Sports Physicians - Gilbert Office](#)

3615 S. Rome St.  
Gilbert, AZ 85297

If you need to reschedule your appointment, please give 24 hours notice and call 602-840-0681.