

## **Medial Branch Blocks & Radiofrequency Ablation**

### **What are Medial Branch Blocks and Radiofrequency Ablation?**

- The facet joints in the neck and back provide stability and allow for motions such as bending and twisting of the spine. Arthritis of the facet joints, known as spondylosis or facet syndrome, can be the result of the aging process, repetitive spinal stress, or trauma. The nerves that supply the facet joints are known as medial branch nerves.
- The goal of diagnostic medial branch blocks is to determine if the pain you are experiencing is coming from the facet joints by temporarily numbing the medial branch nerves. If your pain is coming from the facet joints, you will feel relief for a few hours following a medial branch block.
- If you get significant relief through the temporary medial branch blocks, you may be a candidate for a radiofrequency ablation (AKA RFA, rhizotomy, radiofrequency neurotomy). This procedure involves using a small amount of radiofrequency energy to heat the medial branch nerve. This will prevent the nerve from sending pain signals to the spinal cord and brain. Pain relief varies but, on average, patients will receive 6-18 months of relief.
- The injection is performed under real-time x-ray guidance and needle position is confirmed with either contrast dye for the medial branch blocks or nerve stimulation prior to performance of the radiofrequency ablation.
- This injection is performed in conjunction with other treatment modalities, such as physical therapy, massage/soft tissue release, chiropractic treatment, acupuncture, and medications to help you attain the most amount of pain relief.

### **Risks of Injection:**

- Medial branch blocks and RFA are generally very safe. However, there are potential risks associated with them:
  - Infection
  - Bleeding
  - Nerve injury
  - Post-dural puncture headache
  - Elevation of blood sugar or blood pressure due to steroids

### **Prior to the injection:**

- Blood thinners must be held prior to the injection to reduce the risk of bleeding. Please contact your prescribing physician for approval to stop these medications.
- Light sedation is offered for the procedure. You may not eat or drink 8 hours prior to your injection if you are receiving sedation.
- Notify your physician if you have had recent fevers, illnesses, or hospitalizations.



**Injection Day and Afterwards:**

- Please wear comfortable shoes and clothes. You will change into a gown at the center and lie face-down for the procedure.
- The injection takes approximately 15 minutes. Please allow 1-2 hours of time at the facility.
- Arrange for a driver to transfer you home from the facility as you may have had sedation and/or experience temporary numbness or weakness requiring assistance.
- In the 4-6 hours following the medial branch blocks, please perform safe activities that normally aggravate your pain to determine if performing the RFA will benefit you. You may rest following the RFA.
- You may resume Physical Therapy 2 days following the injection as tolerated.
- Please arrange for a follow-up visit in the office 1-2 weeks after your injection.