

Information for Patients

Radiofrequency facet joint denervation is a procedure where nerves in the back are made inactive by radiofrequency waves (a type of electromagnetic radiation) to relieve back pain. This procedure is also sometimes called 'dorsal rhizotomy' or 'radiofrequency ablation'. The facet joints are small pairs of joints that link the bones of your spine together. If your back pain is thought to be caused by wear and tear at these joints, making the nerves that supply these joints inactive may be helpful in reducing your pain. However, this will only help a small number of people who have been assessed by back pain specialists.

About the condition and procedure

Lower back pain is a very common complaint and can affect a person's quality of life. However, it is rarely caused by serious disease and will often improve over time or with some changes to lifestyle. If other steps to control your pain haven't worked then your specialist might consider radiofrequency denervation. This involves inserting a needle into your back under local anaesthetic and using heat from the needle to destroy the nerve endings in the joint.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the procedure?

Most people with back pain do not need this procedure. However, a small number of people who have not found benefit from other treatments may experience reduced pain after this procedure.

What are the **RISKS**?

There is the risk that the procedure will not work in relieving pain or that the pain may come back after a while. There are also risks of bleeding, infection, and damage to nerve structures around the spine.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

Continuing with day-to-day activities as much as possible can benefit many people. For some people, losing weight, physical exercise, physiotherapy and/or pain killers may also help. You can discuss alternatives, and what is best for you, with your doctor.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Most back pain often settles by itself. However, for many people, periods of back pain may come and go throughout their life.

For more information on back pain see [Back pain - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

You can find out more about the [Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online