

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

General information on Pulsed Radiofrequency Procedures

NB. This information sheet provides general information about the above procedure(s) and is not specific to you or your condition. Practice may vary between doctors and for each patient. You should consult your specialist for specific information.

What is a Pulsed Radiofrequency procedure?

Pulsed Radiofrequency is used to treat pain from one or more specific nerves. It is performed in an operating theatre, under light sedation. Many different nerves can be treated in this way, although most commonly it is used for treating pain from the nerve roots as they leave the spine.

A needle is introduced so that it is next to the nerve that is being targeted. An ultrasound machine or x-ray machine is used to ensure that the needle is in the correct position. Once the needle is in the correct position, it is very gently heated which stimulates a reaction in the nerve to 're-organise' the malfunctioning nerve impulses.

When is a Pulsed Radiofrequency procedure used?

Pulsed Radiofrequency is often used when a nerve has been identified as the cause of your pain following a nerve block, but the effect of the block has not been long-lasting. Pulsed Radiofrequency procedures can lead to pain relief that has a longer duration than other procedures. It can be used for various types of leg pain, arm pain, shoulder pain and headache.

What happens during the procedure?

Prior to the procedure your specialist will obtain your written consent. This involves a discussion of the procedure including risks and complications. Only sign your consent when you are ready to proceed.

Your procedure will be undertaken in a hospital or day surgery centre with specifically trained nursing and theatre teams.

Bring your current medication list in with you for the procedure and continue taking your normal medication. Specific instructions will be provided if you are taking blood thinning medication or diabetic medications.

The majority of procedures are undertaken under sedation, although some procedures can occur without sedation. Rarely a general anaesthetic is required. You will meet an anaesthetist, who will discuss the sedation plan with you. They will usually prepare you for the procedure by measuring observations such as blood pressure, inserting a small needle to administer medications and will attend to you throughout the procedure.

During the procedure the specialist will do your injection, using an x-ray machine or ultrasound to check the position of the needle. You may feel a pushing or tightness sensation, but if you experience any discomfort you should let your doctor know.

What happens after the procedure?

You will be taken to a recovery or ward area while you are still feeling sleepy and monitored by the nursing staff. You will be advised when to get dressed and when you are safe to go home, usually within a few hours of the procedure. When the local anaesthetic wears off you may feel some aching or soreness at the injection site. Do not worry if your pain is slightly worse for a few days after the procedure. Your normal pain medications can be taken, unless advised otherwise, and the injection site should be kept clean and dry for 24 hours.

Ensure that follow-up arrangements are in place with your specialist.

Going home and overnight

If your procedure involves sedation or a general anaesthetic you must go home with a supporting adult. This does not include a taxi or uber driver. An adult must be with you overnight. If this is not possible for you, hospital admission can be arranged. If these arrangements are not in place your procedure will be postponed.

In addition, you should not drive, operate machinery, sign legal documents, provide unsupervised childcare or drink alcohol until fit to do so.

You should discuss return to work with your doctor.

Side effects

- Mild soreness or a bruise around the injection site
- Infection is rare. Seek medical help if there is local warmth or redness around the injection site and/or you feel ill and hot.
- Serious complications depend on the procedure and will be discussed at consent
- Your procedure may be ineffective.

What can I expect in the days after the injection?

You can expect some bruising and aching around the injection site. Please keep the area clean and dry for 24 hours. Your pain may initially feel worse after the procedure – this is normal, and you should take painkillers regularly until this settles, as well as your normal medications. Keep moving, although avoid strenuous activity. You can gradually increase your activity as your pain improves. Your specialist can advise further on this.

Pulsed Radiofrequency procedures are intended to be therapeutic and provide significant and long-standing pain relief. However, the full effect of the treatment may not be felt for up to TWO MONTHS after the procedure. This is normal and your pain specialist will follow up with you to assess your pain levels.