
Pain Service

Pulsed Radiofrequency

What is pulsed radiofrequency?

Pulsed radiofrequency is a technique designed to give long term pain management. We use it when we have identified one or more particular nerve or ganglion as the cause of your pain following diagnostic injection. The nerve is stunned by an intermittent electrical current from a special machine called a radiofrequency machine.

Before the procedure

- Treatment takes place as an outpatient at the Ely day Surgery Unit or Addenbrookes Pain Clinic Treatment Room.
- Your stay may be around two to four hours. Before any treatment begins you will be asked to provide assurance that someone is able to drive you home if you after your injections.
- You will have a morning or an afternoon appointment.
- Your doctor will discuss the procedure with you and ask you to sign a consent form.
- You will be asked to undress and change into a theatre gown and your blood pressure and pulse will be recorded.

The procedure

This information leaflet is to be read in conjunction with the leaflet titled 'Advice to be read before your Pain Clinic injection treatment'.

- You may have a small needle (Cannula) placed in the back of your hand. This allows the doctor to give you sedation and/or intravenous fluids if necessary.
- A self-adhesive foil plate will be placed on your thigh. This is connected to the radio-frequency machine to make an electrical circuit.
- Once you are lying in the correct position the doctor will clean your back with an antiseptic solution which can feel very cold.
- The procedure will be carried out under x-ray screening.
- Local anaesthetic is injected into your back which may sting at first, but the area will soon go numb.
- A special hollow needle is inserted into your back and then a very thin wire will be threaded down inside the needle and attached at the other end to the machine.

- You will be asked to say when you can feel a tingling or twitching sensation as the doctor tests the machine on different settings. This is very important as it makes sure the tip of the needle is in exactly the right place.
- The machine settings will then be changed to pulsing for up to three minutes. You will feel this as a strong pulse in the area being treated.
- This process may be repeated at different points on your back. A cold spray may be used over the injection site once the procedure is completed.

Following the injection

- After the procedure you will be taken to the recovery area where the nursing staff will observe you.
- You may feel a little drowsy and wish to sleep.
- You will lie flat for about 30 minutes and then be assisted to sit up and offered light refreshment.
- Your blood pressure and pulse will be checked frequently.
- You will be advised when to get dressed and will be given advice and a discharge leaflet when you are ready to go home.

Please ensure that you have arranged for someone to drive you home after this procedure. Failure to do so will result in your procedure being cancelled.

If you have had sedation, we recommend that you arrange for someone to stay with you overnight and that you do not drive for 24 hours.

What to expect afterwards

- You may notice a feeling of numbness, heaviness or pins and needles. This is normal and will wear off.
- Some people find that their pain initially feels worse for a few weeks (pain flare up) before it then settles.
- Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal.
- It may help to use a hot water bottle or an ice pack on the affected area.
- Try to keep on the move about the house but do not do anything too strenuous.
- As your pain decreases you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming on your back will help to improve your muscle tone and strengthen your back. The best way is to increase your activity slowly.
- Try not to overdo things on a good day so that you end up paying for it with more pain the following day.

Follow up

A letter will be sent to your GP and you will receive an appointment for review with your doctor approximately three months after your injections.

Points to remember

- Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading
- Always bring a list of all current medication.
- Continue taking all your usual medication on treatment day unless advised to omit anything by the Pain Clinic.
- If there is any possibility you may be pregnant please inform the doctor or nurse.

Additional information

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. If you require more information or have any questions please speak to your GP or contact the Pain Clinic.

Telephone number: 01223 217796



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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