



Radiofrequency Treatment for Facet Joint Back Pain: Thermal Radiofrequency Denervation and Pulsed Radiofrequency

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- Radiofrequency treatment for facet joint pain comes in two types. Thermal radiofrequency denervation (ablation) heats a small section of the nerve to stop it carrying pain until it regrows. Pulsed radiofrequency uses short bursts of current, keeps the tissue below the temperature that destroys nerve, and aims to change how the nerve signals.
- Thermal treatment is the type NICE suggests considering for selected people. NICE's review did not assess pulsed treatment, so it neither recommends nor advises against it.
- Either type follows a diagnostic medial branch block that gave good, short-lived relief. In Mr Sadek's practice, treatment is typically performed about 6 weeks after a positive block, and the choice of type is made with you by the treating specialist.
- Evidence for both is mixed; relief after pulsed treatment seems shorter.
- Serious complications are rare. Keep up exercise alongside treatment.

After the procedure, call 999 or go to A&E if you have back pain and:

- Pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs.
- Loss of feeling around your genitals or your bottom (anus).
- Changes in your bladder or bowels, such as difficulty peeing, or peeing or pooing yourself.
- Changes in how your genitals feel during sex, or new problems getting or keeping an erection or reaching orgasm.
- Chest pain.

Numbness or heaviness in a leg for a few hours can follow the local anaesthetic. The symptoms above are different. Do not drive yourself to A&E: ask someone to take you, or call 999. See also our warning signs page.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.

If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP,

NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

Written by Mr Ahmed-Ramadan Sadek, Neurosurgeon.



Scan for the full guide