

THORACIC RADIOFREQUENCY LESIONING

For Chronic Upper & Mid Back Pain

A thoracic radiofrequency lesioning (RFL) is an outpatient procedure for treating upper & mid back pain. This information sheet will explain what it is. Your doctor can explain if it is for you.

What are thoracic facet joints?

Facet joints connect the vertebrae, the bones of the spine. They help guide your spine when you move. The section of your spine between your neck and low back is called the thoracic region. It contains twelve vertebrae.

Facet joints are found on both sides of the spine. Each is about the size of a thumbnail. Thoracic facet joints are named for the vertebrae they connect and the side of the spine where they are found. The right 2-3 facet joint, for example, joins the 2nd and 3rd vertebrae on the right side.

Medial branch blocks are found near facet joints. They transmit pain signals from the facet joints to your brain.

What is thoracic facet pain?

You may feel pain if a thoracic facet joint is injured. Sometimes it feels like muscle tension, other times it can be severe pain. The cartilage inside the joint may be injured, other times only connecting ligaments surrounding the joint are injured.

Facet pain also depends on which facet joints are affected. Pain from thoracic facet joints occurs in an area from your upper back & shoulder down to your hips..

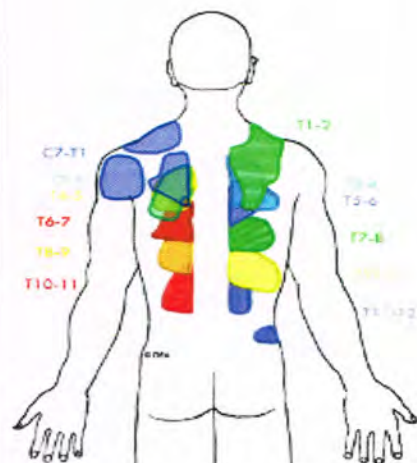
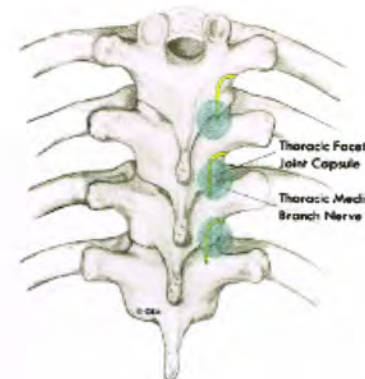
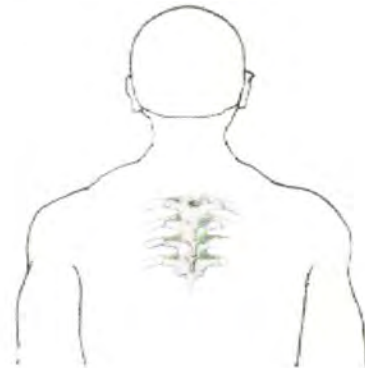
How do I know if I have thoracic facet pain?

If you have pain in one or more of these areas, and it last longer than two months, you may have thoracic facet pain. Common tests such as x-rays or MRI's may not always show if a facet is causing pain.

What is a thoracic RFL?

RFL uses radiofrequency energy to disrupt nerve function. When this is done to a thoracic medial branch nerve, the nerve can no longer transmit pain from an injured facet joint.

What happens during an RFL?



Based on: Dreyfuss P, Tibiletti C, Dreyer S. Thoracic Zygapophysial Joint Pain Patterns. Spine. 1994; 19(7):807-811.

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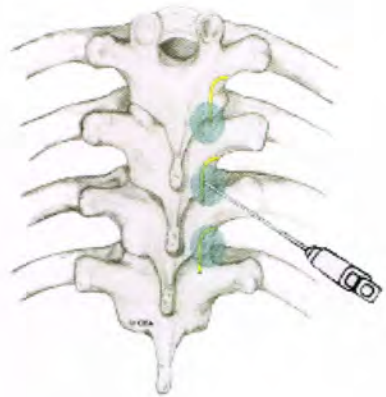
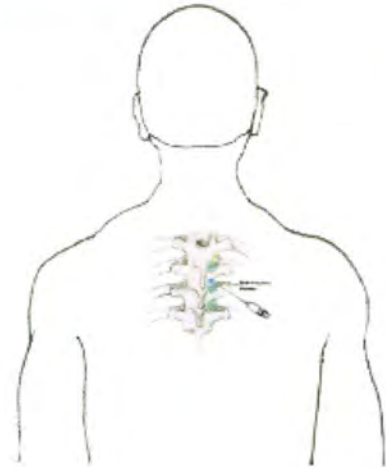
A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle near the facet joint. X-ray will be used to position the needle. The doctor will then check to make sure it is at the correct nerve by stimulating it. This may cause muscle twitching and provoke some of your pain. Once the needle is properly placed, the nerve will be numbed. Radiofrequency energy will then be used to disrupt the medial branch nerve. This is repeated for each level needed.

What happens after an injection?

You will be monitored for up to 60 minutes after the RFL. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions. Take it easy for the rest of the day. You may feel sore for one to four days. It may be due to muscle and nerve irritation. Your back may feel weak, numb or itchy for a couple of weeks. You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

How long can I expect pain relief?

Nerves regenerate after an RFL, but how long this takes varies. Your pain may or may not return when the nerves regenerate. If it does, another RFL can be done.



Consultants in Pain Management

2000 Stein Drive
Chattanooga, TN 37421
(423)648-8480 Fax (423)648-8481

Dr. Gregory Ball
Dr. Sandra Kaplan