

Cervical Medial Branch Blocks → Radiofrequency Ablation

Finding — then switching off — arthritic joint pain in the neck

Step-by-step visual guide
Review with your care team

What it is: Each facet joint of the neck reports its pain through two tiny nerves called medial branches. This two-step approach first tests whether those joints are truly the source, then quiets the confirmed nerves with precise heat.

Often used for: Neck pain and stiffness from facet-joint arthritis — often worse looking up or turning, sometimes with headaches that start at the base of the skull.

Two visits

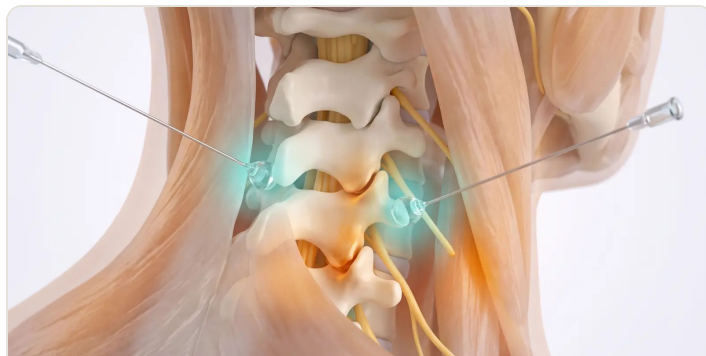
X-ray guided

Relief often 9–18 months



1 The pain source

Facet joints are the small joints at the back of the spine where each vertebra glides on the next. With arthritis they become inflamed (shown glowing) and send steady aching signals through their tiny medial branch nerves.



2 Step one — the test block

Through very thin needles, a drop of numbing medicine is placed precisely where each medial branch crosses the bone. If your usual pain drops substantially while the numbing lasts, the joints are confirmed as the source.



3 Step two — radiofrequency ablation

A slender cannula with a heated tip is placed alongside each confirmed nerve. It creates one small, controlled heat lesion — just millimeters wide — interrupting the pain signal without disturbing surrounding structures.



4 Lasting relief

The treated nerves can no longer deliver the joint's pain message. Relief typically lasts 9–18 months. The nerves slowly regrow, and the procedure can be safely repeated.

What to expect: A test block wears off the same day — that is expected; it is a diagnostic. After ablation, soreness for up to a week, then relief settles in over 2–4 weeks.

This handout is general patient-education material, not medical advice or a treatment recommendation. Illustrations are simplified artistic renderings, not exact anatomy. Benefits, risks, alternatives, and recovery vary by person — your physician will review the specifics of your situation, and you can ask questions at any time. Seek immediate care for fever, new weakness or numbness, loss of bladder or bowel control, or severe worsening pain.