

Lumbar Medial Branch Blocks → Radiofrequency Ablation

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

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

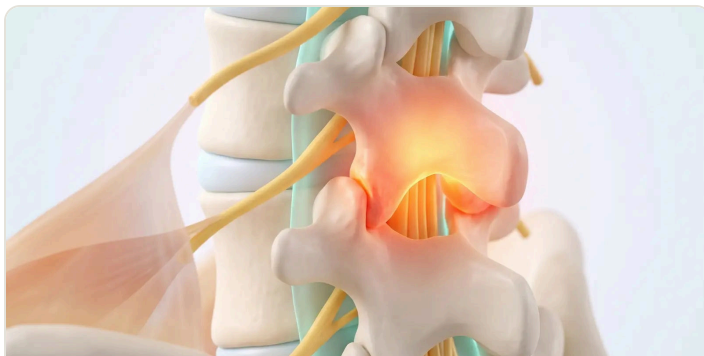
What it is: Each facet joint of the low back reports its pain through two tiny medial branch nerves. First a numbing test confirms the joints are the real source; then radiofrequency heat quiets those nerves for long-lasting relief.

Often used for: Back pain from facet-joint arthritis — typically worse with standing, arching backward, or twisting, and better sitting.

Two visits

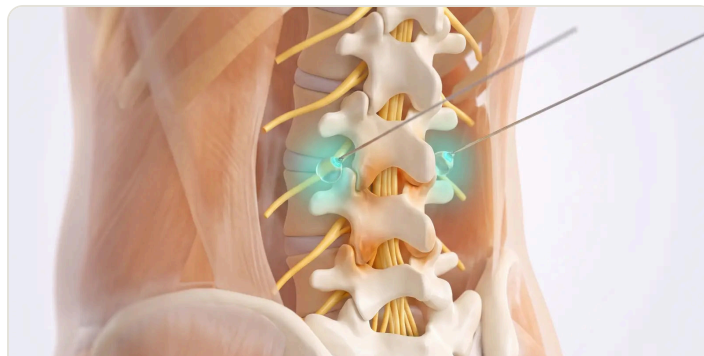
X-ray guided

Relief often 9–18 months



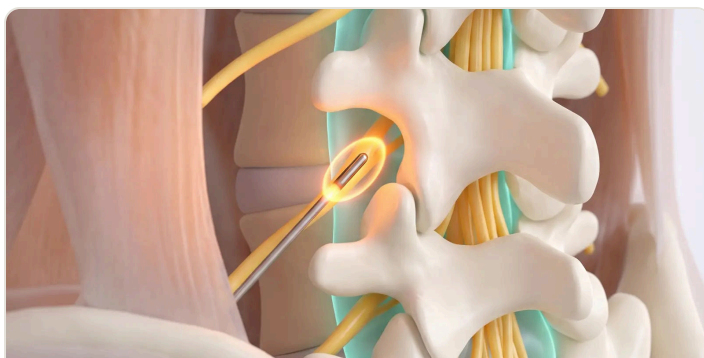
1 The pain source

Facet joints are the paired joints where each vertebra interlocks with the next. Arthritic ones become inflamed (shown glowing) and ache — the signal carried by two tiny medial branch nerves per joint.



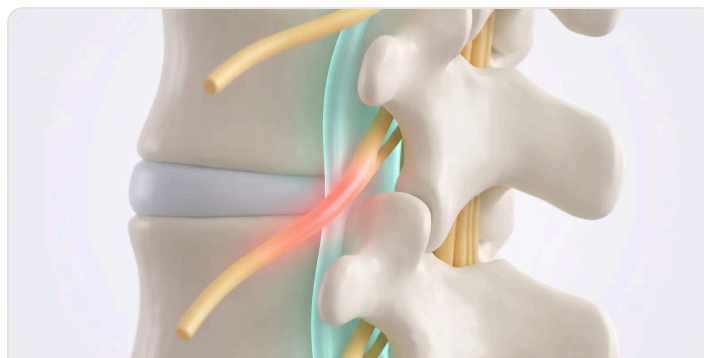
2 Step one — the test block

Very thin needles place a drop of numbing medicine exactly where each medial branch crosses the bone. If your usual pain drops substantially for the next hours, the joints are confirmed as the pain source.



3 Step two — radiofrequency ablation

A slender heated tip lies alongside each confirmed nerve and creates a precise, millimeters-wide heat lesion — interrupting the pain signal while everything around it is protected.



4 Lasting relief

With its messenger nerves quieted, the joint's pain message no longer reaches the spine. Relief typically lasts 9–18 months, and the procedure can be repeated when the nerves regrow.

What to expect: After ablation expect up to a week of soreness (like a deep bruise), then steadily improving relief 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.