Radiofrequency Ablation for Spinal Pain

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Definition

Radiofrequency ablation (RFA) (aka facet neurotomy, facet rhizotomy or articular rhizolysis) is a percutaneous treatment using radiowave-induced heat to create a lesion in a spinal sensory nerve. The goal of RFA is to relieve pain by interrupting the transmission of pain signals from the sensory nerve to the brain.

Related Medical Guideline

Pain Management

Guideline

Members with moderate to severe cervical or lumbar spinal pain are eligible for coverage of radiofrequency ablation (RFA) when the following criteria are met.

Supportive documentation that must be presented to the Plan includes the medical record on history, physical and radiographic evaluations.

1. Low back (lumbar) or neck (cervical) pain is secondary to facet joint origin, as evidenced by the absence of nerve root compression and radicular pain.
2. Neuroradiologic studies do not confirm any disc herniation
3. Pain is refractory for a 6-month period and has failed to respond to 3 months of conservative management (e.g., nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory/opioid medications, chiropractic therapy/physical therapy and a home exercise program).
4. Demonstration of symptom relief secondary to a trial of 2 controlled diagnostic medial branch blocks provided under a standard alternating protocol of alternating short and long-acting anesthetic blocks. No IV sedation or opioids should be used during this.
5. No history of spinal fusion surgery in the vertebral level being treated.
Limitations/Exclusions

1. Emblem considers RFA in the thoracic spine to be experimental/investigational due to a lack of evidence supporting use of the procedure.

2. Use of thermal RFA to destroy any other spinal structure other than the medial branch nerve is considered investigational and hence not covered.

3. Denervation procedures of the sacroiliac joint are considered experimental/investigational.

4. Non-thermal RF modalities for medial branch ablation including chemical, low-grade thermal, or pulsed radiofrequency ablation are not covered.

5. As results may be transient, a repeat RFA is considered medically necessary when a prior treatment has been successful as follows:
   - ≥ 6-month treatment lapse per level per side.
   - Achievement of ≥ 50% pain reduction in conjunction with functional improvement.

6. The following treatment protocols are not considered to be medically necessary:
   - > 1 treatment per level per side within a 6-month period.
   - > 2 treatments per year.
   - Long-term, repeated or maintenance. (Requests for treatment beyond the 1st year will be medical-director-reviewed)

   Note: RFA performed to the medial branch nerves for a maximum of 3 facet levels, or denervation of 5 spinal medial branches unilaterally, will be allowed on a single visit.

7. The following procedures are not considered medically necessary, as they are investigational:
   - Automated percutaneous lumbar discectomy (APLD)/automated percutaneous nucleotomy.
   - Coblation® Nucleoplasty™, disc nucleoplasty, decompression nucleoplasty plasma disc decompression.
   - Cryoneurolysis.
   - Devices for anular repair (e.g., Inclose™ Surgical Mesh System, Xclose™ Tissue Repair System).
   - Endoscopic epidural adhesiolysis.
   - Epiduroscopy, epidural myeloscopy, epidural spinal endoscopy.
   - Intervertebral disc biacuplasty.
   - Laser ablation.
   - Laser discectomy (percutaneous or laparoscopic), laser-assisted disc decompression (LADD), laser disc decompression.
   - Percutaneous epidural adhesiolysis, percutaneous epidural lysis of adhesions.
   - Percutaneous intradiscal radiofrequency thermocoagulation (PIRFT), intradiscal radiofrequency.
   - Thermomodulation, percutaneous radiofrequency thermomodulation, Intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty (IDET)/percutaneous intradiscal radiofrequency thermocoagulation)/SpineCATH™.
   - Pulsed radiofrequency.
   - Racz procedure.
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Revision History
November 13, 2015 — thoracic pain indication removed

Applicable Procedure Codes

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>64633</td>
<td>Destruction by neurolytic agent, paravertebral facet joint nerve(s), with imaging guidance (fluoroscopy or CT); cervical or thoracic, single facet joint</td>
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<tr>
<td>64634</td>
<td>Destruction by neurolytic agent, paravertebral facet joint nerve(s), with imaging guidance (fluoroscopy or CT); cervical or thoracic, each additional facet joint (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)</td>
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<td>64636</td>
<td>Destruction by neurolytic agent, paravertebral facet joint nerve(s), with imaging guidance (fluoroscopy or CT); lumbar or sacral, each additional facet joint (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)</td>
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Applicable ICD-10 Diagnosis Codes

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
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<tr>
<td>M53.0</td>
<td>Cervicocranial syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>M53.1</td>
<td>Cervicobrachial syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>M53.81</td>
<td>Other specified dorsopathies, occipito-atlanto-axial region</td>
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<tr>
<td>M53.82</td>
<td>Other specified dorsopathies, cervical region</td>
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<tr>
<td>M53.83</td>
<td>Other specified dorsopathies, cervicothoracic region</td>
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<tr>
<td>M53.85</td>
<td>Other specified dorsopathies, thoracolumbar region</td>
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<tr>
<td>M54.2</td>
<td>Cervicalgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>M54.40</td>
<td>Lumbago with sciatica, unspecified side</td>
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<tr>
<td>M54.41</td>
<td>Lumbago with sciatica, right side</td>
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<td>M54.42</td>
<td>Lumbago with sciatica, left side</td>
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<tr>
<td>M54.5</td>
<td>Low back pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>M54.81</td>
<td>Occipital neuralgia</td>
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</table>

References


Specialty-matched clinical peer review.

