Many patients suffer with back pain. Individuals occasionally have pain due to mechanical activities, degenerative osteoarthritis, trauma or post-operative scarring that can stimulate pain generators or irritated nerves around the spine.

An initial test requires anesthetizing the particular spine (facet) joints that are painful. Your doctor will put to “sleep” the potentially irritated nerve for a brief period of time to test the area to see if it is actually a pain generator that contributes to your back pain symptoms. If this test confirms that specific pain sites are located in your facet joints then you will have to return for a follow up visit to perform the next procedure which is radiofrequency neurolysis. Radiofrequency Neurolysis provides a potentially longer lasting method for pain control as compared to standard spine injection procedures.

Should I do anything before the procedure?
1. Bring your prior X-ray studies.
2. Do not eat breakfast/ lunch or anything prior to the procedure.
3. You may take your medication(s) in the morning with a small sip of water.
4. Because the procedure involves injection with a needle, medications that affect blood clotting function such as Coumadin, Plavix, Aspirin, NSAID’S or other blood thinners should be held prior to the procedure. You will be given special instructions for this.
5. Tell your doctor if you are allergic to any medications.

What does this procedure involve?
The procedure involves using a special needle that is placed near the sites that are contributing to your back pain. Radiofrequency energy is delivered to the special needles tip at a pre-selected temperature in order to alter the nerve’s ability to perceive pain. It is not uncommon for your doctor to perform this procedure at multiple sites. The procedure takes about one hour to perform. At the completion you will be transported back to the recovery area and discharged 1 hour after. You may experience soreness in your back for up to 7 days after the procedure. This can be treated with analgesic and anti-inflammatory medication. You should experience some if not complete relief of your back pain symptoms for an extended period of time (up to 12 months).

What are the risks of the procedure?
Fortunately, these are extremely rare. The risks include: pain, bleeding, infection, and neural injury. The use of X-ray guidance combined with the expertise of your doctor and your cooperation in your care significantly reduce the risk of this procedure.