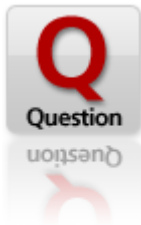


As seen in:



Ask the Experts

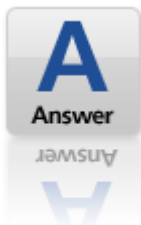
What to do for scar tissue in my back?



Question:

I just finished reading the [answer concerning rhizotomy](#) and am left with another question. If this procedure "cooks" the nerves to gain pain relief, would it be a viable option for patients with arachnoiditis? And if not, is there a treatment for this horrific condition?

—Nashville, TN



Answer:

Thanks for your question about arachnoiditis, which is a very painful condition that affects your spinal nerve roots. In my [previous answer on radiofrequency rhizotomy](#), I did say that it "cooks" the nerves. However, RF is used to treat *joint* pain, and arachnoiditis is a problem inside the spinal canal. That area and the nerves in the spinal canal can't be treated by [RF](#), unfortunately.

Here's why radiofrequency rhizotomy won't work for arachnoiditis:

Arachnoiditis is an inflammation of one of the protective layers around the spinal canal. You can think of it as scar tissue that develops in the arachnoid lining. The lining can become inflamed due to repeated intervention on the spine: many surgeries can lead to scarring, for example. It can also develop because of certain spinal infections and perhaps because of chemicals in epidural steroid injections, especially if those chemicals get into the spinal fluid.

Arachnoiditis causes the nerve roots to clump together; this clumping can cause nerve pain, numbness and tingling. Patients with arachnoiditis tend to have pain no matter what position they're in or what they're doing. Moving around or avoiding some movements won't bring pain relief because the pain is from the arachnoid lining inflammation, not from a joint.

[Radiofrequency rhizotomy](#) is most effective on joint pain. Patients who are good candidates for [RF](#) have pain when they're doing activities that stress the spine. [RF](#) blocks the nerves around the joint from sending pain signals to the brain, and that pain-free period usually lasts around one year. In that time, patients should learn postural correction and good body mechanics. [RF](#) gives patients the opportunity to get back their mobility and learn how to go about their daily lives with less pain.

Continued on page 2

This Week's Expert:



*John J. Fitzgerald, MD
Pain Management Specialist
Center for Pain Management
Indianapolis, Ind.*

[Dr. John Fitzgerald](#) joined the [Center for Pain Management](#) in 2004. Dr. Fitzgerald is a distinguished leader in the field of [radiofrequency rhizotomy](#) and has trained numerous central Indiana physicians on the tools and techniques used to relieve the symptoms of painful neuromuscular conditions.

Board certified in anesthesiology, pain management and pain medicine (with recertification in 2006), he has practiced both anesthesiology and pain management at Methodist Hospital and was chairman of the anesthesiology section at Methodist in 1995. Since the late 1990s, [Dr. Fitzgerald](#) has practiced pain management exclusively. In particular, he focuses on [radiofrequency rhizotomy](#), having been taught by the internationally renowned physicians and scientists who developed the procedure and the equipment used to perform it.

(cont.)

Here's what may help with arachnoiditis:

Patients with arachnoiditis do have some pain management treatment options available, although there is no cure for this condition. Patients may try medications to find pain relief. Some options are:

- NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)
- [corticosteroids](#)
- anti-spasm drugs
- anti-convulsant drugs
- [narcotic pain relievers](#)

Some of these medications may be given with a spinal pump. That's a small device implanted under the skin that delivers medication directly to the inflamed area.

Patients may also try [spinal cord stimulation](#). My colleague, [Dr. Kowlowitz](#), has an [excellent article that explains SCS](#) here on SpineUniverse.

Dr. Fitzgerald is a 1977 graduate of Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Mich., graduating summa cum laude with bachelor's degrees in biosciences and English literature. He earned his doctor of medicine degree in 1982 from Indiana University School of Medicine. After serving a two-year tour of duty as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service in Wolf Point, Mont., and Cherokee, Ala., Dr. Fitzgerald completed a residency in Anesthesiology at Indiana University Medical Center.

Dr. Fitzgerald is a member of the Columbia Club, Christ Church Cathedral and the FBI Citizen's Academy Alumni Association; a supporting member of the U.S. Naval Institute; and a life member of the Law Enforcement Alliance of America.

Licensure and Board Certification:

- Indiana Medical License since 1982
- Board Certification in Anesthesiology, 1990, 2006
- Subspecialty Anesthesiology Certification in Pain Management, 1996
- Certification in Pain Medicine, American Board of Pain Medicine, 1994
- Certification, American Academy of Minimally Invasive Spinal Medicine, 1999

Hospital Privileges:

- St. Vincent Hospital
- Westview Hospital

Medical Societies:

- Indiana State Medical Association
- American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians

Lecturing and Publications:

- Lecturer at various spinal medicine, medical and osteopathic conferences in Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Nevada and Tennessee; 1999-2006
- Lecturer at Inaugural Meeting; American Academy of Minimally Invasive Spinal Medicine and Surgery; December, 1999
- Guest Lecturer; University Hospital of Maastricht, The Netherlands; March, 1998