

Radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction for turbinate hypertrophy

**Understanding NICE guidance –
information for people considering the
procedure, and for the public**

January 2004



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197

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A version in Welsh and English is also available, reference number N0417. Mae fersiwn yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg ar gael hefyd, rhif cyfeirnod N0417. The NICE interventional procedures guidance on which this information is based is available from the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk). Copies can also be obtained from the NHS Response Line, reference number N0415.

**National Institute for
Clinical Excellence**

MidCity Place
71 High Holborn
London
WC1V 6NA

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Contents

About this information	4
About radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction	5
What has NICE decided?	8
What the decision means for you	9
Further information	10

About this information

This information describes the guidance that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued to the NHS on a procedure called radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction. It is not a complete description of what is involved in the procedure – the patient’s healthcare team should describe it in detail.

NICE has looked at whether radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction is safe enough and works well enough for it to be used routinely for the treatment of a condition called ‘inferior turbinate hypertrophy’, which causes a persistently blocked nose.

To produce this guidance, NICE has:

- looked at the results of studies on the safety of radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction and how well it works
- asked experts for their opinion
- asked the views of the organisations that speak for the healthcare professionals and the patients and carers who will be affected by this guidance.

This guidance is part of NICE’s work on ‘interventional procedures’ (see ‘Further information’ on page 10).

About radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction

The inferior turbinates are small bones in the nose, covered by a membrane that produces mucus. If the mucous membrane becomes inflamed and swollen, the inferior turbinates enlarge. Doctors call this 'inferior turbinate hypertrophy'.

People with inferior turbinate hypertrophy have long-term symptoms that can range from mild congestion to a completely blocked nose. They may sometimes have a very runny nose. Their sleep can be affected and they may get headaches or have facial pain or discomfort.

Decongestants, nasal sprays or steroid injections can be used to treat the problem. If these don't work and the turbinates are still enlarged, then surgery may be used to reduce them. This can be done using lasers, electric current or by cutting away part of the turbinate.

In radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction, a needle-shaped electrode (a probe through which an electrical current passes) is placed into the turbinate. The electrode is used to heat and destroy the tissue.

How well it works

What the studies said

In all the studies, patients said their blocked nose was improved after treatment and this was supported by a study of 24 people showing good improvement in symptoms after two months. However, sometimes patients might think their symptoms have improved when in fact they have not (known as a placebo response). This might be the case in these studies.

What the experts said

Only a small number of people took part in the studies. Because of this, there was not enough evidence available for the experts to be sure about how well this procedure works.

Risks and possible problems

What the studies said

The most common problems after this procedure were bleeding, swelling or crusting of the nasal membranes and adhesions (when the tissues stick together). Some patients found the procedure painful. However, it is not clear how these problems were related to the dose of energy given in the treatment.

What the experts said

The experts thought that bleeding and infection may occur after this procedure and that it may be possible to destroy more tissue than intended. One expert thought that this procedure was no less safe than any other technique that involves using an electric current.

What has NICE decided?

NICE has decided that, if a doctor wants to carry out radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction, he or she should make sure that the patient understands what is involved and that there are still uncertainties over the safety of the procedure and how well it works. There should be special arrangements in place so that the patient only agrees (consents) to the procedure after this discussion has taken place. There should also be special arrangements in place for monitoring what happens when a person has radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction.

What the decision means for you

Your doctor may have offered you radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction. NICE has considered this procedure because it is relatively new. NICE has decided that there are uncertainties about the benefits and risks of radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction which you need to understand before you agree to it. Your doctor should discuss the benefits and risks with you. Some of these benefits and risks may be described above.

Further information

You have the right to be fully informed and to share in decision-making about the treatment you receive. You may want to discuss this guidance with the doctors and nurses looking after you.

You can visit the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk) for further information about the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Interventional Procedures Programme. A copy of the full guidance on radiofrequency volumetric tissue reduction is on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/IPG036guidance), or you can order a copy from the website or by telephoning the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quoting reference number N0415. The evidence that NICE considered in developing this guidance is also available from the NICE website.

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