

Wireless capsule endoscopy for investigation of the small bowel

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

December 2004



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197

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Copies of this booklet can be ordered from the NHS Response Line; telephone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference number N0775.

A version in Welsh and English is also available, reference number N0776. Mae fersiwn yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg ar gael hefyd, rhif cyfeirnod N0776. The NICE interventional procedures guidance on which this information is based is available from the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/IPG101guidance). Copies can also be obtained from the NHS Response Line, reference number N0774.

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Contents

About this information	4
About wireless capsule endoscopy	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 wireless capsule endoscopy. 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 wireless capsule endoscopy is safe enough and works well enough for it to be used routinely to look at the inside surface of the small bowel to check for problems. The main reason for doing this is if there’s been bleeding somewhere in the digestive system and the doctors haven’t been able to find the cause using endoscopy (endoscopy involves using a narrow viewing tube to look inside the digestive system). Other possible reasons for using wireless capsule endoscopy include checking for or diagnosing Crohn’s disease, which is an inflammatory condition affecting the intestine.

To produce this guidance, NICE has:

- looked at the results of studies on the safety of wireless capsule endoscopy and how well it works
- asked experts for their opinions

- 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 wireless capsule endoscopy

Wireless capsule endoscopy provides a way of examining the inside surface of a patient's small bowel.

The patient swallows a small capsule containing a tiny camera. As the capsule passes through the patient's body, it takes pictures and these are transmitted to a data recorder that the patient wears on a belt. The pictures are then transferred to a computer where the patient's health team can check them.

The capsule is passed out of the body naturally. The capsule and camera are not re-used.

How well it works

What the studies said

In studies, doctors were able to find the cause of internal bleeding in 31% to 76% of patients who had wireless capsule endoscopy (31% is the same as saying 31 people in 100). And wireless capsule endoscopy appeared to be more useful for finding problems than other tests. This result may not be reliable, though, as it may have been affected by the number of previous tests the person had had.

Wireless capsule endoscopy was also shown to be able to detect possible Crohn's disease. Signs of the disease were picked up in 43% to 71% of people who'd had normal results on other tests. This led to changes being made to the patients' treatment and an improvement in their health. But the results of these studies didn't allow reliable comparisons to be made between the different tests for diagnosing Crohn's disease.

Risks and possible problems

What the studies said

Patients in the studies had no major problems during or after the wireless capsule endoscopy. The most common problems were abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting. Some patients found that the capsule took longer to pass than expected, but in most cases it came out eventually without surgery or treatment.

In a study of 200 people who swallowed the capsule, 6 had problems. Among these, two people had to have surgery to remove the capsule, one person couldn't swallow the capsule and one person accidentally inhaled the capsule.

What the experts said

The experts thought that the procedure was safe. The most likely problem was the capsule becoming lodged in the small intestine, which could lead to a blockage. One expert said that this would be more common in someone with suspected Crohn's disease than in someone with bleeding.

What has NICE decided?

NICE has considered the evidence on wireless capsule endoscopy. It has recommended that doctors should think about using other tests before they use wireless capsule endoscopy, especially if the patient has suspected Crohn's disease. If doctors do want to use wireless capsule endoscopy, NICE has recommended they should be sure that:

- the patient understands what is involved and agrees (consents) to the treatment, and
- the results of the procedure are monitored.

What the decision means for you

Your doctor may have offered you wireless capsule endoscopy for the investigation of your small bowel. NICE has considered this procedure because it is relatively new. NICE has decided that the procedure is safe enough and works well enough for use in the NHS, although they have asked doctors to think about other tests that could be used first. If you are offered wireless capsule endoscopy, you should understand the benefits and risks before you agree to it. Your doctor should discuss these with you. Some 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 wireless capsule endoscopy for the investigation of the small bowel is on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/IPG101guidance), or you can order a copy from the website or by telephoning the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quoting reference number N0774. The evidence that NICE considered in developing this guidance is also available from the NICE website.

If you want more information on problems affecting the digestive system, a good starting point is NHS Direct, telephone 0845 4647, or NHS Direct Online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk).

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