

Imaging department

# Ethanol ablation (EA) for the treatment of thyroid nodules

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet contains information for patients (and their family and carers) about thyroid ethanol ablation (EA). This is used to treat non-cancerous (benign) thyroid cysts or predominantly cystic thyroid nodules. It is not intended to replace the consultation between you and your doctor but aims to explain what is involved, the benefits and possible risks.

### What is an ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound scan is a non-invasive way of imaging inside the body that uses high frequency sound waves. These sound waves cannot be heard by the human ear. A computer converts the information in the sound waves into a moving picture that is displayed on a monitor. Images from this can then be stored electronically.

### What is ultrasound-guided ethanol ablation (EA)?

Ablation is a technique used to shrink tissue.

1. A needle is used to draw fluid out of a thyroid nodule
2. Neat alcohol (ethanol) is injected inside the nodule.

The needle is inserted after local anaesthetic. Ultrasound is used to guide the needle into the nodule.

The aim is to damage the lining of the nodule so that it shrinks, and fluid cannot reaccumulate.

### Is this treatment suitable for me?

You will have a neck ultrasound scan and fine needle aspiration biopsy to confirm your thyroid cyst is benign. If we confirm the sample is benign, and you still get symptoms from your thyroid cyst, this treatment may be suitable for you.

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## Is EA effective?

Yes. It is a safe procedure. Its main advantage is that it can treat benign thyroid cysts causing symptoms under local anaesthetic without the need for 'open' surgery or hospital admission. The procedure will be performed by a medical doctor who specialises in imaging (a radiologist).

For every 100 patients, EA has been shown to be successful in 65 to 100 (65-100% of patients). You may feel a benefit from the procedure as soon as it is finished but the duration of action may take 3 to 6 months. Occasionally patients will require a second treatment with EA.

## Are there any risks in having EA?

All treatments and procedures have risks and we will discuss the risks of EA when we go through the consent with you.

### **Problems that may happen straight away**

- local discomfort or pain when the needle is inserted and when the ethanol is injected
- bleeding at the site of needle insertion – typically this is mild and stops when pressure is applied
- some people report feelings of 'drunkenness' such as light-headedness and facial flushing. If this occurs, we will monitor you in the department until these feelings go away. We would advise you not to work or drive on the day of your procedure.

### **Problems that may happen after several days or weeks**

- there is a small risk (less than 1 person in 100) of infection following this treatment. We will advise you to look out for worsening pain, redness or swelling, and what steps to take if this happens.

### **Problems that are rare**

- there is a small risk (less than 1 person in 100) of injury to the nerve supplying your voice box, leading to alteration of your voice. In cases where this has been reported, the effect has been temporary

## How to prepare for ablation

You will be asked about your medical history and any medicines or tablets you take. It helps if you bring written details of this with you. When you come to the hospital it would be useful to bring simple painkillers from home, for example, paracetamol.

We suggest you have a responsible adult to take you home afterwards.

## Asking for your consent

Before your procedure, we will ask you to sign a consent form. This will say that you fully understand the reasons and risks of this treatment. If you have further questions or need more time to think about it, it is important to tell a member of staff.

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## What happens during the procedure?

1. You will be lying down comfortably for the procedure. We may ask you to put on a hospital gown.
2. A radiologist will perform the ultrasound scan.
3. We may ask you to change your position.
4. Your skin will be cleaned, and local anaesthetic will be injected to numb the skin.
5. Ultrasound images will be used to guide a needle into the nodule and then fluid will be taken away (aspirated) from this. Neat alcohol (ethanol) will then be injected.
6. The whole procedure usually takes approximately 15 to 30 minutes.
7. You will be observed in the department for approximately 20 minutes after the procedure.

## What happens after the treatment?

You will be moved to an observation area after the treatment. If you have any pain or discomfort we can give you some pain relief (either pain relief medication you have brought with you or we can prescribe some if required). Most people do not require anything stronger than paracetamol.

Before you go home, we will check that you do not feel sick, that you can swallow, and that you do not have significant pain.

You should have someone to take you home and we do not advise you to drive afterwards. Before you leave, we will discuss your follow-up appointment.

If you have any questions or worries, just ask someone. The radiology staff want to make you feel as relaxed as possible.

## How will I be followed up afterwards?

You will be sent an appointment to come back for a follow up ultrasound scan approximately 12 to 24 weeks after the procedure. This will monitor the size or shrinkage of the treated nodule and ensure your recovery is going well.

## What if I cannot keep my appointment?

Please contact us as soon as possible. We can then offer this date to another patient and agree a new appointment date and time with you.

You will find the appropriate telephone number on your appointment letter.

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## How do I get to the hospital?

Please visit the Trust's website for more information about travelling to our hospitals:  
[www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations)

## Contact details

Please do not hesitate to contact our imaging departments if you have any queries or concerns:

- **Charing Cross Hospital:** Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8RF  
Telephone: **020 3313 0077**
- **St Mary's Hospital:** Praed Street, Paddington, London W2 1NY  
Telephone: **020 3312 6418**

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:  
[imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)