

MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation for uterine fibroids

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

December 2003



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**MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation for uterine fibroids:
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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 magnetic resonance (MR) image-guided percutaneous laser ablation. 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 MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation is safe enough and works well enough for it to be used routinely for the treatment of uterine fibroids.

To produce this guidance, NICE has:

- looked at the results of studies on the safety of MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation 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 MR-image-guided percutaneous laser ablation of uterine fibroids

Fibroids are non-cancerous growths. When they occur in the uterus (womb), they can cause heavy bleeding and pressure and pain in the abdomen; they can also sometimes make it difficult for a woman to carry a pregnancy to term.

MR-image-guided percutaneous laser ablation is a minimally invasive technique used to destroy fibroids. Magnetic resonance imaging produces images of the woman's uterus. Using these images, fine needles are inserted through the skin under local anaesthetic and guided into the fibroid to be removed. Laser fibres are inserted down the centre of each of the needles into the fibroid and the laser's heat is used to destroy it. The images change colour as the right temperature is reached to destroy the fibroid. A fine tube (catheter) is placed in the woman's bladder before the start of the procedure and she receives drugs to help her relax and relieve any pain throughout.

If the symptoms are improved after the procedure it means the woman may not need to have her uterus removed (this means she may be able to become pregnant in the future).

A more common treatment for fibroids is hysterectomy, which involves removing the woman's uterus in an operation carried out under general anaesthetic. A woman cannot become pregnant after she has had her uterus removed.

How well it works

What the studies said

There was only a small amount of evidence available. The limited evidence suggested that women's fibroids may have shrunk by nearly a third by three months after the procedure.

What the experts said

The experts noted that this was a new procedure. One expert thought the procedure may only work on small fibroids and may not benefit women with larger or several fibroids.

Risks and possible problems

What the studies said

Most women did not have complications following this procedure. Problems that were seen included urinary tract infections, minor skin burns and bleeding from the vagina, but these were quite mild and lasted a short time.

What the experts said

The experts thought that problems with infections, burns, or damage to the uterus, bowel or bladder may occur.

What has NICE decided?

NICE has decided that, if a doctor wants to carry out MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation, 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 MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation.

What the decision means for you

Your doctor may have offered you MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation. NICE has considered this procedure because it is relatively new. NICE has decided that there are uncertainties about the benefits and risks of MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation 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 MR image-guided percutaneous laser ablation is on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/IPG030guidance), or you can order a copy from the website or by telephoning the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quoting reference number NON0391. The evidence that NICE considered in developing this guidance is also available from the NICE website.

If you want more information on uterine fibroids, a good starting point is NHS Direct, telephone 0845 4647, or NHS Direct Online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk).

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