

# Patient Information for Consent

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## OG31 Radio-Frequency Endometrial Ablation

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## COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organization confirmed COVID-19 (coronavirus) has now spread all over the world (this means it is a 'pandemic'). Hospitals have very robust infection control procedures. If you catch the coronavirus, this could affect your recovery and might increase your risk of pneumonia and even death. Talk to your healthcare team about the balance of risk between waiting until the pandemic is over (this could be many months) and going ahead with your procedure. If your procedure is routine (rather than urgent), your doctor may recommend a delay.

Please visit the World Health Organization website: <https://www.who.int/> for up-to-date information.

## What is a radio-frequency endometrial ablation?

A radio-frequency endometrial ablation is an operation that uses radio-frequency energy to thin the lining (endometrium) of your uterus (womb). After the operation most women have a noticeable reduction in their periods and, for some women, periods stop altogether.

Your gynaecologist has recommended an endometrial ablation. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your gynaecologist or the healthcare team.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

The most common reason for having an endometrial ablation is to relieve the symptoms of heavy periods (abnormal uterine bleeding). An endometrial ablation is another effective treatment instead of a hysterectomy. It also has fewer complications and a quicker recovery time.

An endometrial ablation may not be suitable if your heavy periods are caused by one or more of the following conditions.

- Fibroids, where the muscle of your womb becomes overgrown.
- Polyps – A polyp is an overgrowth of the lining of your womb that looks like a small grape on a stalk.
- Excessive thickening of the lining of your womb.

For most women, no specific cause can be found for heavy periods.

Most women will have much less bleeding when they have their period. Pain is usually reduced a lot, although for some women mild cramping may still happen.

Just under half of the women who have the operation will not have periods anymore.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Heavy periods can be treated using a variety of non-hormonal and hormonal oral (by mouth) medications.

Other alternatives include an IUS (intra-uterine system - an implant containing a synthetic form of the hormone progesterone that fits in your womb) but these are usually tried before surgery is recommended.

You should discuss the options with your gynaecologist.

## What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Your doctor will continue to try to control your symptoms with medication, or you can continue without treatment. For some women this is acceptable if the cause of the symptoms is not serious.

## What happens before the operation?

You may need to have an ultrasound scan of your womb to find out if it is the right size and shape for you to have the operation.

Depending on your age and symptoms, your gynaecologist may also recommend that you have a biopsy (removing small pieces of tissue from the lining of your womb). They will also check that you are up-to-date with your smear tests, and that you are using a reliable method of contraception.

Your gynaecologist may ask you to have a pregnancy test. Sometimes the test does not show an early-stage pregnancy so let your gynaecologist know if you could be pregnant.

The operation can usually be performed at any stage of your menstrual cycle.

If you are having a general anaesthetic, your gynaecologist may arrange for you to have a pre-admission assessment. They will carry out several tests and checks to find out if you are fit enough for the operation. If you have any questions about the operation, you should ask the healthcare team at this visit.

## What does the operation involve?

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for. You can help by confirming to your gynaecologist and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

The operation can be performed under a local or general anaesthetic. Your anaesthetist or gynaecologist will discuss the options with you. You may also have injections of local anaesthetic to help with the pain after the operation. You may be given antibiotics during the operation to reduce the risk of infection. The operation usually takes less than 20 minutes.

Your gynaecologist will examine your vagina. They will usually pass a hysteroscope (telescope) through your vagina, across your cervix (neck of your womb) into your womb.

Your gynaecologist will pass fluid or gas through the telescope to distend (swell) your womb. They will confirm that your womb is the right size and shape for you to have the operation and they may perform a biopsy.

Your gynaecologist will place a radio-frequency probe into your womb. The probe is attached to a radio-frequency generator. They will expand a mesh from the probe in your womb. Your gynaecologist will check that your womb is intact and then pass radio-frequency energy through the mesh. The radio-frequency energy will be delivered for about 90 seconds, thinning the lining of your womb (see figure 1).

Your gynaecologist will remove the probe and will usually use the hysteroscope to check your womb.

## What should I do about my medication?

Let your doctor know about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

## What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

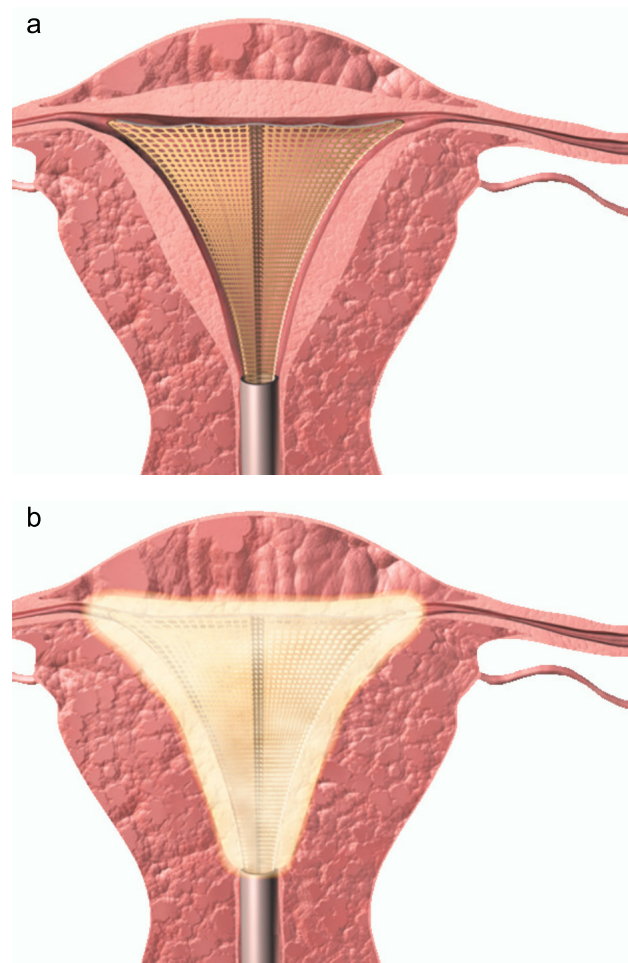


Figure 1

a A mesh expanded inside the womb

b Radio-frequency energy through the mesh

## What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make the operation as safe as possible but complications can happen. Some of these can be serious and can even cause death. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of women who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

## General complications of any operation

- Pain is a cramping pain similar to a period and is usually easily controlled with simple painkillers such as paracetamol.
- Feeling or being sick. Most women have only mild symptoms and feel better within 1 to 2 days without needing any medication.
- Bleeding or discharge, lasting up to 4 weeks. It starts off heavy but gradually gets lighter.
- Infection (risk: 3 in 100). Most infections are minor and often happen after leaving hospital. They are usually easily treated with antibiotics.
- Blood clot in your leg (deep-vein thrombosis – DVT) (risk: less than 1 in 200). This can cause pain, swelling or redness in your leg, or the veins near the surface of your leg to appear larger than normal. The healthcare team will assess your risk. They will encourage you to get out of bed soon after the operation and may give you injections, medication, or special stockings to wear. Let the healthcare team know straightaway if you think you might have a DVT.
- Blood clot in your lung (pulmonary embolus), if a blood clot moves through your bloodstream to your lungs. Let the healthcare team know straightaway if you become short of breath, feel pain in your chest or upper back, or if you cough up blood. If you are at home, call an ambulance or go immediately to your nearest Emergency department.

## Specific early complications

- Failed procedure, if the equipment fails or if it is not possible to place the radio-frequency probe into your womb.
- Making a hole in your womb with possible damage to a nearby structure (risk: 8 in 1,000). You may need to stay overnight for close observation in case you develop complications. If your gynaecologist is concerned that an organ has been damaged, you may need keyhole surgery or another operation involving a larger cut (risk: 1 in 650).
- Thermal burns, if radio-frequency energy passes through the wall of your womb and damages nearby structures such as your bowel (risk: less than 1 in 1,000).

## Specific late complications

- Continued bleeding or pain needing another endometrial ablation or a hysterectomy (risk: less than 1 in 10 in the first 5 years).
- Haematometra, where blood and other menstrual fluid collect in pockets in your womb (risk: less than 1 in 100). If these pockets do not drain across your cervix or through your fallopian tubes, they can cause pain. Most women will not have periods and the pockets are usually noticed on a scan.
- If you have been previously sterilised, tubal sterilisation syndrome (risk: less than 1 in 1,000). Menstrual fluid gets trapped in a fallopian tube, causing pain.

## How soon will I recover?

### In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward.

The healthcare team will tell you what was found during the operation and discuss with you any treatment or follow-up you need.

You should be able to go home the same day. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer. If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

### Returning to normal activities

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination. If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

To reduce the risk of a blood clot, make sure you follow carefully the instructions of the healthcare team if you have been given medication or need to wear special stockings.

You may get some cramps and mild bleeding similar to a period. Rest for 1 to 2 days and take painkillers if you need them.

You should be able to return to normal activities after 2 to 4 days. Most women are fit for work after about a week.

You should expect to have some bleeding or discharge for up to 4 weeks. This may be heavy and red to start with but will change to a red-brown discharge. Use sanitary pads, not tampons.

To reduce the risk of infection, do not have sex, or have a bath or swim until the discharge has settled.

Let your doctor know if you develop any of the following problems.

- A high temperature.
- Heavy bleeding or an unpleasant-smelling discharge from your vagina.
- Your pain does not settle or increases and is not relieved by your medication.
- Pain in your lower leg.
- Breathing difficulties.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

## Will I need hormone replacement therapy (HRT)?

An endometrial ablation will not affect when you go through menopause. At the time of menopause, if you want to go on HRT, your doctor should give you an oestrogen and progesterone hormone.

## Do I still need smear tests?

As the operation has no effect on your cervix, continue to have regular smear tests.

## Will I still be able to have children?

The operation is not recommended for women who still want children. Serious complications for you and your baby can happen if you become pregnant after an endometrial ablation.

Even if your periods stop, there is still a risk of becoming pregnant. Do not rely on the operation as a method of contraception. If neither you nor your partner has been sterilised, continue to use a reliable method of contraception.

## Summary

An endometrial ablation is a common gynaecological operation. It helps relieve the symptoms of heavy periods. You should get less bleeding and pain.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

**Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.**

### Acknowledgements

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