

Patient Information

For : Educational Material

Ablation Treatment of Heart Rhythm Problems

What is radiofrequency ablation?

Radiofrequency ablation uses electrical energy delivered to the inside of the heart to treat abnormal heart rhythms. This procedure blocks abnormal electrical pathways in the heart. This helps stop abnormal heart rhythms.

When is it needed?

Pathways in the heart carry electrical signals that cause the heart to beat too fast. Drugs may be used to treat abnormal heartbeats. However, for some people, the drugs do not work well, or are not the best way to treat their condition. It may be better to block the part of the heart's electrical system that is not needed. Successful ablation may treat the problem without the need to take more drugs.

Examples of heart rhythm problems that may be treated with ablation include Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, supraventricular tachycardia, atrial fibrillation, and ventricular tachycardia.

How is it done?

Before the procedure you will be given medicines to prevent you from feeling pain. A catheter, which is a small tube, is put through a vein in your groin. The tip of the catheter is guided by X-ray to the right place in your heart. The provider uses the catheter to record electrical signals from within your heart and find the place in the heart that is causing the problem. A small electrode at the tip of the catheter sends radio waves into the abnormal pathway to block it. Your heart heals the damage from the ablation by forming a small scar and that blocks the path from being used again.

Your provider will record electrical activity from within the heart again before removing the catheter. The procedure may last several hours.

What happens after the procedure?

Some people do not need further treatment. Sometimes, the heart rhythm problem comes back after the ablation, and the

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procedure may need to be done again. It requires little recovery time. You can usually go back to your normal activities within a few days.

There are some risks with this procedure. The catheter may cause bleeding where it is put into the vein. The catheter might also hurt the heart muscle or esophagus. Ablation sometimes destroys more heart tissue than wanted and causes another heart rhythm problem called a block. Blood clots may break off and cause a stroke. Sometimes the ablation is done near the lungs, and may cause breathing problems or coughing up blood. Ask your provider how these risks apply to you.

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