

## New clinical trial to investigate the use of Radio Frequency Ablation (RFA) to treat benign thyroid nodules

Interview with Prof Kristien Boelaert, Professor of Endocrinology at the University of Birmingham and Consultant Endocrinologist at University Hospitals Birmingham

Thyroid nodules are lumps in the neck. Some benign thyroid nodules grow and cause pressure, pain or cosmetic issues.

If treatment is required, patients are usually offered surgery either to remove part or all of the thyroid. RFA is a less invasive treatment option than surgery and some studies have shown it can shrink the size of benign thyroid nodules and cause fewer complications than surgery. Despite RFA being



performed widely in other countries, it is only available in a few centres in the UK. These centres include the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, the Royal Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, Birmingham and Leicester.

Researchers at the University of Birmingham are currently setting up a clinical trial called Radiofrequency Ablation of Benign Intrathyroidal Tumours (RABBIT) which will compare RFA to surgery as a treatment for benign thyroid nodules. We asked Prof Kristien Boelaert, one of the lead investigators, about the trial.

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# Projects

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## What is the aim of the clinical trial?

The RABBIT trial aims to determine whether RFA is as effective as surgery in reducing symptoms from thyroid nodules and whether it is associated with fewer complications and better cost-effectiveness and acceptability to patients.

## What will it involve?

You will be approached by your local care team if you are thought to be eligible by your clinician. With your consent, you will undergo various screening assessments to confirm you are eligible for the trial. You will be randomly allocated to either have surgery or RFA for your thyroid nodule. Patients undergoing surgery will have the half of their thyroid containing the nodule removed. RFA involves inserting a needle through the skin over the nodule. This procedure is guided by ultrasound and the needle delivers heat treatments that destroy a small area of thyroid tissue thereby shrinking the nodule.

## Where is it taking place?

The trial is led by the University of Birmingham but will be undertaken in up to 20 centres across the UK.

## Which patients might be suitable for the trial?

Patients with one or more thyroid nodules that cause compression, or cosmetic symptoms affecting their quality of life, may be eligible. The thyroid nodule needs to be benign and not affect the function of the thyroid i.e. a non-toxic nodule. This will be determined through blood testing, ultrasound and fine needle aspiration cytology (FNAC) before you may be considered for the trial. Patients who are pregnant on the day of intervention are not eligible.

## How can patients get involved?

You will be asked by the clinician who decides that your nodule needs intervention if you are willing to take part in the trial. If you are offered treatment for a symptomatic thyroid nodule and the trial is not mentioned, you can ask your clinician if you may be considered to take part and potentially be referred to a centre where the trial is running.

## Can patients choose which treatment they receive?

No, you cannot choose which of the two treatments you will receive since this is a randomised trial. Randomisation is needed so we can get the best possible evaluation of how effective RFA is compared to the standard treatment of surgery.

## How frequently will participants be monitored?

After the intervention, you will be followed up in the clinic at three, 12 and 36 months. You will have blood tests to check your thyroid function, physical assessments, and up to two vocal cord checks at the follow-up visits. You will also be asked to complete several quality of life, pain and resource

use questionnaires at the start (baseline), and at three, 12, 24, and 36 months after the intervention. If you undergo RFA you will have an ultrasound scan at these follow-up visits.

## If patients have to travel will they receive any help with expenses?

There is no reimbursement available for participants beyond that normally offered by your hospital.

## Who can patients contact to find out more?

You can find out more on the trial website: [www.birmingham.ac.uk/Rabbit](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Rabbit) or by speaking to your clinician.

## STOP PRESS

Doctors at Princess Royal University Hospital, London are using another pioneering technique to treat benign thyroid nodules. Like RFA, microwave ablation is a non-invasive procedure with fewer risks than surgery. Read more about it at [btf-thyroid.org/less-invasive-treatment-options-for-benign-thyroid-nodules](http://btf-thyroid.org/less-invasive-treatment-options-for-benign-thyroid-nodules)



## Revised low iodine diet fact sheet

Thyroid cancer patients tell us they find it confusing to follow a low iodine diet before

undergoing radioiodine treatment.

The UK Low Iodine Working Group has updated its fact sheet and accompanying information in response to this patient feedback. The fact sheet now provides lists of foods labelled as either 'OK to Eat' or 'Try Not to Eat' and is intended to reduce the anxiety some patients feel when following the diet.

You can view the fact sheet and suggested low iodine diet recipes at [btf-thyroid.org/low-iodine-diet](http://btf-thyroid.org/low-iodine-diet)

## European Hormone Day

On 24 April we will be joining our friends from the European Society of Endocrinology (ESE), and the European Hormone and Metabolism Foundation (EHMF), highlighting simple steps we can all take towards better hormone health.

Look out for updates across our website and social media channels.



**European Hormone Day**  
Because Hormones Matter  
24 April 2024