



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Thyroid Radiofrequency Ablation



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What is the thyroid?

- The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland below your voice box at the base of your neck.
- The thyroid makes a hormone that controls the activity of many cells in your body.

What is a thyroid nodule?

- A thyroid nodule is an abnormal growth of cells in the thyroid gland. It can be solid, filled with fluid, or a mix of both.
- About 95% of thyroid nodules are benign (not cancer).
- Although many people do not have any symptoms, some thyroid nodules can cause problems if they get too big. Symptoms can include:
 - › Swelling at the base of the neck
 - › Hoarse voice
 - › Coughing
 - › Trouble breathing and/or swallowing
 - › A feeling of pressure

What is radiofrequency ablation?

- Radiofrequency ablation (RFA) is a procedure that uses heat to destroy tissues.
- During RFA, the endocrinologist (a doctor who specializes in treating hormone problems) will use an ultrasound to guide an electrode needle into your thyroid.
- Once the needle is in the right place, they will send an electric current through it. The heat from the current will destroy the cells.
- The procedure will take between 30 to 60 minutes (½ an hour to 1 hour).

Why do I need RFA?

- If you have a nodule in your thyroid, RFA can make it smaller.
- Your body will absorb (take in) the destroyed tissue over time. This will shrink the nodule over weeks to months.
- A **toxic adenoma** is a nodule in the thyroid that makes too much thyroid hormone. If you have a toxic adenoma, RFA can make it smaller and stop it from making too much thyroid hormone.

How do I get ready for my appointment?

- Although the procedure only takes 30 to 60 minutes, please plan to stay in the clinic for 2 to 3 hours.

You must have a responsible adult drive you home after your appointment. You cannot drive yourself.



- **Do not** wear any jewelry. Any metal items (like body piercings) must be taken out before the procedure.
- You may take your medications as usual.
 - › If you take any blood-thinning medications (like warfarin), please tell your doctor before your procedure.
- You may eat a light meal in the morning before your appointment.
- **Do not** use scented products. Nova Scotia Health is scent-free.

What will happen before my procedure?

- We will ask you to take off all items with metal (like jewelry, clothes with metal clasps) and change into a hospital gown.

- We will give you medication to help you relax. Please tell your doctor if you have had any issues or reactions with this medication in the past.
- We will put 2 sticky pads on your thighs. These are called **grounding pads**. They let the electrical current flow back into the machine. We may need to shave the hair on your thighs so the pads stick.

What will happen during the procedure?

- We will ask you to lie on an examination table.
- The doctor will do an ultrasound of your neck. Then they will use a needle to inject local anesthetic (freezing) into your neck to numb the area.
- They will insert (put in) the RFA needle and send an electric current through it.
- You may feel pressure and hear popping sounds.
- You will be able to talk, swallow, and breathe normally.
- After your procedure, your doctor will take the RFA needle out and put a small bandage on the area.

After your procedure

- You will rest in the clinic for 30 to 60 minutes.
- We will put ice packs on your neck.
- **You will not be allowed to drive yourself.**
You must have a responsible adult drive you home.
- You can go back to your usual daily activities right away, including eating. You should be able to go back to work or school the next day.

Care at home

- Right after your procedure, your neck may feel stiff or tight.
- Your neck may have mild swelling and bruising. This usually goes away within 7 to 10 days.
- Your voice may be hoarse or raspy. This usually goes away within days to weeks.

For 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) after your procedure:

- Keep the area clean and dry.
- Put an ice pack on your neck for 10 to 20 minutes at a time, several times a day.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®) regularly for the first 24 hours. Follow the instructions on the package.
 - › Then take it as needed for 1 to 2 more days.

- **Do not** do any strenuous (hard) activities or exercise (like moving furniture, mowing the lawn, or shoveling snow).

After this time, you should be able to go back to your usual activities.

You will have a follow-up visit 4 to 6 weeks after the procedure.

Call your endocrinologist if you have any of the following:

- A lot of bruising, bruising that is getting worse, or bruising with trouble breathing or swallowing
- Signs of infection, like:
 - › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
 - › More redness, swelling, and/or pain at the insertion site
 - › Discharge from the insertion site
- Nodule rupture (a rare complication that can happen weeks after having RFA). Symptoms include:
 - › Sudden swelling and pain at the nodule site
 - › Fever

If you cannot reach your endocrinologist, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

Resources

- To watch a video about thyroid RFA, scan the QR code below or visit:
 - › www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTIWO0keCiA

Scan the QR code on your device (open the camera on your device, point the camera at the code, and tap the banner or border that appears)



This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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