

# Transobturator foramen procedures for stress urinary incontinence

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

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Copies of this booklet can be ordered from the NHS Response Line; telephone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference number N0790.

A version in Welsh and English is also available, reference number N0791. Mae fersiwn yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg ar gael hefyd, rhif cyfeirnod N0791. The NICE interventional procedures guidance on which this information is based is available from the NICE website ([www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)). Copies can also be obtained from the NHS Response Line, reference number N0789.

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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 transobturator foramen procedures for stress urinary incontinence in women. It is not a complete description of what is involved in these procedures – the woman's healthcare team should describe the procedure being offered in detail.

NICE has looked at whether transobturator foramen procedures are safe enough and work well enough for them to be used routinely for the treatment of stress incontinence.

To produce this guidance, NICE has:

- looked at the results of studies on the safety of transobturator foramen procedures and how well they work
- asked experts for their opinions
- asked the views of the organisations that speak for the healthcare professionals and the women 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 transobturator foramen procedures

Stress urinary incontinence, often just called stress incontinence, is where a person leaks urine when they exercise or cough, sneeze or laugh. It usually happens because the muscles and tissues that make up the pelvic floor have become damaged or weak. The pelvic floor works like a sling that goes from the pubic bone in the front to the base of the spine at the back. It supports the urethra, among other things – the urethra being the tube that carries urine down from the bladder. When the pelvic floor is strong and can keep the urethra in the right position, the urethra can form a tight seal so that urine doesn't leak out. But if the pelvic floor is damaged or weak, it doesn't support the urethra properly. So when a person moves and there's pressure on the urethra, it moves out of position. The tight seal is lost and urine leaks out.

Transobturator foramen procedures involve inserting a tape to act as a sling around the urethra so that it is supported and stays in the right position even when there's pressure on it. The tape is put into place through small openings made in the skin and the vagina.

Some doctors use a viewing tube called a cystoscope to check what's happening to the urethra and bladder during the procedure.

## How well it works

### What the studies said

In the studies NICE looked at, a transobturator foramen procedure was successful in nearly all the women who had it – 82% to 96% of women were free from stress incontinence after having it. And 89% to 100% of women had at least some improvement in their symptoms. (82% is the same as saying 82 people in 100.)

Two trials compared a transobturator foramen procedure with a similar procedure that involves using tape as a sling (this is called transvaginal tape or TVT for short). Both procedures gave similar results.

### What the experts said

The experts said that the studies had not been run for long enough to see how well the transobturator foramen procedures worked in the long term, so there were still uncertainties.

## Risks and possible problems

### What the studies said

In the studies, the main problem women had was urinary retention. This is where a person can't empty all the urine out of their bladder. In the studies NICE looked at, 1–16% of women had this problem after the surgery. Other problems were:

- haemorrhage (bleeding), which affected 2 out of 94 women
- damage to the urethra, which affected 2 out of 165 women
- damage to the bladder, which affected 1 out of 165 women
- damage to the vagina caused by the tape, which affected 1–4% of women (in 1 woman out of 175, the tape caused damage to the urethra)
- urine infection, which affected 6 out of 30 women
- severe pain that lasted for 1 week, which affected 2 out of 107 women
- a type of infection called sepsis, which affects the whole body – 1 woman out of 107 had this.

## What the experts said

The experts said that it was possible for the nearby nerve to become damaged during the procedure. They listed other possible problems as: bleeding, infection, damage to the bladder or urethra, damage to the surface of the vagina or urethra, and long-term bladder problems.

## What has NICE decided?

NICE has considered the evidence on transobturator foramen procedures for stress urinary incontinence. It has recommended that when doctors use them for women with stress incontinence, they should be sure that:

- the patient understands what is involved and agrees (consents) to the treatment, and
- the results of the procedure are monitored.

The procedure should only be done by doctors who have particular knowledge and experience of treating urinary incontinence in women.

NICE has also encouraged doctors who carry out transobturator foramen procedures to check and record what happens in women over a long period of time so that more can be learnt about the long-term effects.

## What the decision means for you

Your doctor may have offered you a transobturator foramen procedure for stress urinary incontinence. NICE has considered this procedure because it is relatively new. NICE has decided that the procedure is safe enough and works well enough for use in the NHS. Nonetheless you should understand the benefits and risks of the procedure before you agree to it. Your doctor should discuss these with you. Some of them 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](http://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 transobturator foramen procedures for stress urinary incontinence is on the NICE website ([www.nice.org.uk/IPG107guidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/IPG107guidance)), or you can order a copy from the website or by telephoning the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quoting reference number N0789. The evidence that NICE considered in developing this guidance is also available from the NICE website.

If you want more information on incontinence, a good starting point is NHS Direct, telephone 0845 4647, or NHS Direct Online ([www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)).

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