

A guide for patients having interferential therapy

What is interferential therapy?

Interferential therapy is the application of low frequency electrical current to stimulate nerve activity. This is designed to give you pain relief and increase blood flow to the injured area of your body.

What will it involve?

Round suction cup electrodes or flat pads will be applied to the skin over the area to be treated. You will feel a tingling sensation or “beat” effect in your muscles as the electrical signal stimulates the nerve. This sensation varies depending upon the settings that the therapist uses for your treatment. It should feel strong but not uncomfortable. If you experience any discomfort during treatment please tell your therapist immediately.

What are the benefits?

Depending on the frequency of the current applied to the body, interferential therapy can give pain relief, improve blood flow and / or improve muscle activity. It is also thought to help with the reduction of swelling. Potential benefits include:

- Reducing or eliminating your pain safely.
- Noticeably decreasing swelling and inflammation.
- Restoring lost movement and improving restricted movements and coordination.
- Stimulating the natural hormones which can help your body heal faster.
- It is considered by many experts as a highly effective form of treatment for chronic pain (pain which has been long standing).

What conditions can it be used for?

Interferential therapy can be used for a variety of musculoskeletal conditions where the above benefits are desired.

What are the risks?

There are only a few instances where interferential cannot be used.

This treatment may not be suitable for you if:

- You are pregnant.
- You have epilepsy.
- You have cancer (except if being used as part of palliative care).

- You have an electronic implant, such as a pacemaker or stimulator. Some pacemakers and stimulators are relatively immune to interference from electrical stimulation while others can demonstrate serious adverse behaviour. As a general rule it is therefore suggested that electrical stimulation is avoided.
- You have heart or circulatory problems.
- You are taking anticoagulation therapy or have a history of pulmonary embolism or deep vein thrombosis. You should not be treated with the vacuum electrode applications due to the risk of bruising.
- You have a recent infection.
- Your skin is in poor condition in the area to be treated.
- You have had recent radiotherapy.
- If you are not able to consent to treatment.
- You are a child and treatment is required over active growth plates where you are still growing.

Depending on your clinical needs and diagnosis, alternatives to interferential therapy can be discussed with your physiotherapist.

The treatment for your condition may require more than one visit. If you have any other questions about your treatment please ask your physiotherapist.

More information about Interferential may be found at www.electrotherapy.org

Contact information

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Further information

More information is available on the Trust website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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