

# Radiofrequency Ablation: A Treatment Option for Inoperable Liver Cancer

## Study Results Show Increased Survival

Results from a multicenter study led by Cleveland Clinic surgeon Allan Siperstein, M.D., showed that patients with inoperable primary or metastatic liver cancer lived significantly longer when treated with a combination of chemotherapy and radiofrequency ablation (RFA) rather than with chemotherapy alone.

Results from a study presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology in June 2003 showed that RFA in addition to chemotherapy dramatically improves patient survival. At three years, approximately 40 percent to 60 percent of patients treated with RFA were alive, while only 10 percent of patients treated with chemotherapy alone survived.

**M**any liver tumors are not treatable by today's modalities. The Cleveland Clinic's Radiofrequency Ablation program offers patients an option for these non-treatable liver tumors.

### **How is radiofrequency ablation performed?**

Radiofrequency ablation uses heat to destroy tumor cells, which are then reabsorbed into the patient's body. The procedure typically involves making only two small incisions in the abdomen through which the RFA instruments are inserted. Patients require a general anesthesia for the procedure and an overnight stay.

### **What are the benefits of RFA?**

Although RFA is not considered a cure for cancer, the treatment reduces the amount of liver tumor and can extend a patient's life and ease symptoms. In fact, symptoms of hormone-secreting tumors, such as flushing, diarrhea or elevated blood pressure, may lessen or subside. Moreover, long-term side effects have not been noted, and patients recover quickly from the procedure.

### **Who are ideal candidates for RFA?**

Patients with inoperable liver cancer that arose in the liver (known as hepatocellular carcinoma) or those with colon cancer that metastasized to the liver may benefit from treatment with RFA.

In addition, patients with neuroendocrine (hormone-secreting) tumors, as well as other tumor types, that have metastasized to the liver may be helped.

### **What is the Cleveland Clinic's experience with RFA?**

The laparoscopic (minimally invasive) approach for RFA of liver tumors was pioneered in 1996 by Clinic surgical oncologist Allen Siperstein, M.D. To date, Dr. Siperstein has the most extensive long-term experience with this procedure, and he has authored numerous professional papers on the topic. Roughly 100 laparoscopic RFAs are performed at The Cleveland Clinic annually.

### **What would exclude me from having RFA?**

Exclusion from the RFA program is based on the number of tumors, tumor size, location of tumors within the liver, predominant disease outside the liver and the patient's overall health. If RFA isn't right for you, your physician will suggest alternative treatment methods.

### **How many tumors can be treated?**

The number of treatable tumors is evaluated individually. Each patient's diagnosis and case is different.

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***What is the standard follow-up after treatment?***

Standard follow-up examinations are one week after the procedure and every three months thereafter. CT scans of the abdomen, laboratory work and a patient questionnaire are common components of follow-up appointments.

***How is successful treatment measured?***

At one week post-treatment, a CT scan is performed to evaluate the ablated lesion. A successfully ablated tumor should shrink in size and show no blood flow in follow-up CT scans.

***If I have RFA, does this limit me from other treatment options?***

No. After RFA you may undergo other types of treatment.

***Can I be retreated if necessary?***

If you develop new tumors or have a recurrent tumor, you may be a candidate for another RFA treatment.

***Is the cost of RFA covered by insurance?***

Insurance companies typically cover the cost of RFA, because it is a recognized surgical procedure. We work diligently to obtain insurance authorization.

***Can I access treatment if I'm from out-of-town?***

Many patients come to us from outside the Cleveland area. For out-of-town patients and their families, The Cleveland Clinic offers a complimentary medical concierge service.

Among other things, concierge staff members help coordinate multiple appointments, schedule or confirm airline reservations, assist with hotel and housing reservations, and help arrange ground transportation.

This special service makes it easier for patients to access specialized medical care that often is not available close to home.

Follow-up examinations can be done at The Cleveland Clinic or through your primary caregiver. When needed, our clinical coordinators are available.

**Information/Appointments**

For more information, or to schedule an appointment, please contact:

**Nora Herceg, R.N.**

216/444-2262 or

800/223-2273, ext. 42262

E-mail: [hercegn@ccf.org](mailto:hercegn@ccf.org)

**For more information about RFA or to complete a patient evaluation questionnaire, please visit us online:**

**[www.clevelandclinic.org/general/rfa](http://www.clevelandclinic.org/general/rfa)**

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