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**Ablation Therapy**

**Definition**

Ablation therapy (sometimes called radiofrequency ablation) is a procedure that treats heart rhythm irregularities by changing the way the heart beats. To perform this procedure, the physician verifies the location of the problem with a catheter (a small tube) guided by fluoroscopic X-ray.

When the catheter is in place, a small electrode at the tip of the catheter is connected to a radio wave generator. The frequency of the radio waves causes the tissue surrounding the electrode to become so hot that it is destroyed. The heart heals the damage by forming a small scar.

**Symptoms**

Symptoms of heart rhythm abnormalities can include a rapid heartbeat or a very irregular heartbeat. While this is not life-threatening, it can be upsetting in the patient's daily routine.

**Complications**

A risk exists that the transmission system of the heart could be damaged and would require a pacemaker. In an extreme case, the heart muscle itself might suffer harm. However, the overall success of this procedure is very high. Complications are usually minimal-involving only slight discomfort and occasionally some bleeding at the insertion point of the catheter.

**Signs and Tests**

Your healthcare provider will conduct the appropriate examinations and can advise you on the selection of this procedure.

**Treatment**

Drugs are sometimes prescribed to treat heart irregularities. Ablation therapy may be used when

- drugs have undesired side effects or not enough success, or
- the patient is young.

Open-heart surgery is the most invasive of the options for treatment.

**Prognosis (Expectations)**

The prognosis is good. Studies indicate a high degree of success for the procedure. Improved cardiac catheters and advanced X-ray techniques have made the procedure more refined and precise. The patient usually has a rapid recovery.

**Tips**

You can reduce your risks in this procedure by considering your options carefully. For example,

- If medications completely control the symptoms, you might just keep a close watch on the problem, in cooperation with your physician.
- If you decide to have the procedure, look for a surgeon who is knowledgeable in the procedure and has performed it successfully a number of times.