

Radial Extracorporeal Shockwave Therapy (R-ESWT)

Pain therapy with pressure waves

Patient information factsheet



What is it?

- Extracorporeal Shockwave Therapy (ESWT) is a treatment that doesn't need surgery. It uses shockwaves that pass through the skin, to help the part of the body that needs attention.
- Shockwaves are just waves that move like ripples in water, not electric waves. They can provide pain relief for chronic tendinopathies (sore tendons) and are often used in the UK to help people with this condition.

How does it work?

- Radial shockwaves make the treated area react in a way that helps it to heal better.
- Radial shockwaves encourage the body's own healing processes. The body reacts by increasing blood circulation and repairing tissue in the treated area.

- Shockwaves can help lower pain by blocking the signals that nerves send for a short while. They also help the body make pain-relieving chemicals.
- This is known as 'hyper-stimulation anaesthesia'.

How is the shockwave delivered?

- The affected area is examined by touch.
- The treatment is given by using compressed air which impulses through a hand-held device attached to the shockwave machine.
- The shockwave is delivered through the head of the hand held device into the affected area. Contact gel is applied to the skin which improves the delivery of the shockwave.

Why choose ESWT?

- Shockwave therapy triggers the body's self-healing response.
- It is a non-invasive treatment, unlike surgery or injection therapy.
- There are no reported major safety concerns associated with ESWT.
- Usually there is some immediate pain relief.
- It is a recommended therapy supported by national clinical guidelines.

Frequently Ask Questions

How long does the treatment session last?

- The ESWT treatment should take between 5-10 minutes.
- You must attend 3 sessions over 3-5 weeks.

Is the shockwave treatment painful?

- Most patients experience some discomfort during the treatment.
- We will adjust the treatment depending upon your response.
- A mild ache may occur later that day but should pass after 24 hours.
- You may take painkillers afterwards if needed or before attending the next session (see below for more specifics on this).

What is the criteria for referral for ESWT?

- You must have had your condition and tried physiotherapy exercise rehabilitation for at least three months.

- If you are being referred for more than one area of pain, the therapy will focus on the most painful area first.
- We will then move on to the next area, after the first area has improved.
- You cannot have two areas of pain treated in the same session.

Please note: if you have an acute flare-up of your symptoms at the time of your appointment, then treatment will be delayed until this settles down.

What should I be aware of?

ESWT cannot be given if:

- You are under the age of 18.
- You are pregnant.
- There is lung tissue in the area where the shockwaves are applied.
- You received a steroid injection to the same area in the last 12 weeks.
- You have been diagnosed with bone cancer or a suspected tumour.
- There is swelling in the area to be treated.
- There are blood vessels, nerves over the target area.
- There is altered sensation, or the area is very sensitive in the target area i.e. neuropathy.
- You have local metal or plastic implants (such as a pacemaker).

ESWT application may not be given if:

- You have a cardiac pacemaker or cardiac device in the body.
- You are taking blood thinning medications.

After the treatment

- You will be able to return to your usual activities straight away and can return to work immediately.
- Do not do any hard or painful activities or jumping exercises for two days after the treatment.
- If you experience a sudden pain to the area or lose movement, please contact your GP or go to your nearest Accident & Emergency Department.
- You may use simple painkillers if you are still in pain.

- **Do not use** anti-inflammatory medication such as Ibuprofen/Voltarol or use ice on the treated area. These will affect the way that the body is reacting to the shockwave therapy.
- Pain relief may happen immediately, but long-term effects are normally seen after three months.
- Your referring clinician will decide whether another review is required by our service after your treatment.
- All patients must continue to exercise as much as the pain allows after finishing their treatment to benefit from the effects of ESWT.

Contact our service

Musculoskeletal Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service (MSK CATS) and Physiotherapy Services

Tel: 0207 288 3317

Email: whh-tr.mskinterfaceservice@nhs.net

Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

020 7272 3070 | Whittington Health NHS Trust, Magdala Avenue, London, N19 5NF
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