

Other sources of information

International Neuromodulation Society

www.neuromodulation.com/for-patients

Source of general information about stimulation therapies and neuromodulation

The British Pain Society

www.britishpainsociety.org

Information about spinal cord stimulation for the management of pain.

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Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please ring 020 3594 2040 or 020 3594 2050.

For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 7377 7280.

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Patient information

Stimulation Therapies for the management of Chronic Pain

An introduction to having stimulation therapy

Pain Management Department



What are stimulation therapies?

Stimulation therapies are safe treatments that may be used to treat certain types of chronic pain. They include spinal cord stimulation (SCS), dorsal root ganglion stimulation (DRG), occipital nerve stimulation (ONS), and spheno-palatine ganglion stimulation (SPG).

Regardless of the name, all stimulation therapies use similar methods in providing the treatment. A small implanted device (about the size of a matchbox) sends tiny amounts of electricity to two precisely placed fine leads. The electricity stimulates nerve fibers near where the lead is placed. This stimulation changes the way pain messages are processed and sent to the brain. This may reduce some forms of pain, particularly neuropathic (nerve) pain.

You may feel slight tingling over the area of your body that is usually painful. Some stimulation devices do not produce any tingling sensation at all. You may only be aware of a reduction in your pain symptoms.

How is the stimulator put in?

Two small operations are needed, usually 1-2 weeks apart:

Stage 1: A trial lasting 1-2 weeks. The leads are placed in your body and connected to a small device outside your body. This lets you see if the stimulator is going to give you enough pain relief, and whether you like it. The trial also allows the doctor to see what type of stimulation gives you the best pain relief. If the stimulation does not improve your pain a lot, it will be removed at the end of the trial.

Stage 2: If the trial goes well, you will return to theatre to have the permanent stimulator implanted and attached to the leads that were placed in your body during Stage 1.

Both of the procedures take place in the Day Surgery Unit and you will usually go home on the same day. If you are having ONS or SPG these devices are implanted in one operation and you will need an overnight stay in hospital.

Is stimulation safe?

Implanted stimulators have been used in thousands of people over the last 20 years and have been very helpful for some patients.

Side effects can occur. When you come to see the team in the pain clinic all of the risks and side effects will be discussed with you. It is important that if you have any questions you ask them at this time.

What are some of the benefits of stimulation therapy?

People who respond to stimulation therapy experience a significant reduction in their pain. This would normally allow you to increase your daily activity levels and hopefully improve your quality of life. Some people would also be able to, in conjunction with their Pain doctors, reduce and stop their pain medications. Some people will also have better sleep as a result.

To achieve these goals, it is important to remember that the stimulator device on its own can not do all the work. It will help by reducing the pain but then you will need to actively increase your activity levels and reduce your pain medication. This can be difficult in the early stages, but the rewards are worth the effort.

How do I get stimulation therapy?

Stimulation therapies are not suitable for everyone with chronic pain. There is an assessment process and a long waiting list. If your pain consultant feels that stimulation therapy may help you, they will arrange for you to be seen by the multidisciplinary team for assessment. The team consists of a pain consultant, psychologist, neurosurgeon, and clinical nurse specialist.

Only about 40% of people assessed for stimulation therapy are suitable to have the treatment. If, after having looked at your medical records, scans and hearing your history, they think you may be helped by stimulation therapy, they will start you on the pathway. You will receive more information at your next stimulation appointment.