Spinal Cord Stimulation
Relieving Chronic Pain

If chronic pain restricts your life, you may have tried many ways to find relief. This may include medications, nerve blocks, physical therapy, and surgery. Your doctor now suggests that you try **spinal cord stimulation.** This treatment uses a power source to send signals to your spine. These signals help block the pain by replacing it with a more pleasant feeling.

**Keeping a Pain Log**

Your doctor will need to know details about your pain. He or she may ask you to keep a pain log for a certain amount of time. In it, you may answer questions like these: When do you feel pain? Where do you feel it? What does it feel like? What makes it better or worse? Your answers to these questions help show how well spinal cord stimulation may work for you. Your doctor will give you guidelines for writing a pain log. During the time you write the log, you may not be able to take pain medications. Be sure to discuss this with your doctor.
Pain messages travel over nerve pathways to the spine. The spine carries the messages to the brain. Constant pain messages can cause long-term pain that is hard to treat. This is known as chronic pain.

**Spinal Cord Stimulation May Help**

Spinal cord stimulation is one treatment for chronic pain. A small electric power source sends signals to your spinal cord. These signals keep the chronic pain messages from being sent to your brain. Instead, you may feel tingling from the electrical signals.

**The Stimulator System**

The stimulator system has several parts. A power source makes the signals. This power source may be worn outside the body or implanted under the skin on your abdomen or buttocks. One or more leads (flexible, plastic-covered wires) are placed inside the body to carry the signals to the spinal cord. Your doctor can explain the system you’ll be using in more detail.
Stimulator Placement Procedures

Stimulator placement is done in two stages. A trial (test) stage is done to see how well spinal cord stimulation works for you. If the trial stage is a success, the permanent stimulator system is put into place.

Getting Ready at Home
Your doctor will give you guidelines on how to get ready for the procedures. Tell your doctor what medications you take, and ask if you should stop taking any of them. Do not eat or drink for 8 hours before you check in for the procedures, or as instructed.

Placing the Trial Leads
The trial leads are placed under the skin on your back through a small incision. One end of the leads is placed near the spinal cord. The other end of the leads is attached to the stimulator power source. The stimulator is then adjusted to the right level. For the trial stage, you wear the power source outside your body.

The Trial Stage
You will be instructed to keep a second pain log during the trial stage. This log can be compared with your first pain log to show how well the stimulator system is working for you.

Placing the Permanent System
If the trial stimulator works well for you, a permanent system will be put into place. This must be done in the hospital. Prepare for it as instructed. The receiver or the power source is implanted under the skin on your abdomen or buttocks. The power source is small, so it won't show under your clothing. After the system is in place, the settings are checked to make sure they are at the right level for you.
Discuss the results of the trial stage with your doctor.

After the Procedures
You may stay in the hospital overnight. The implant site will be sore for a few days. The leads need some time to become fixed so they don’t move around. Your doctor will tell you what activities to avoid for the next month or so.

When to Call Your Doctor
Call your doctor right away if you have a fever over 101°F, chills, or pain, drainage, or increased redness at the implant site. Also call your doctor if the pain symptoms return.

Risks and Complications
The risks and possible complications include:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Nerve damage
- Failure to relieve pain
You may find that spinal cord stimulation greatly reduces your pain. This treatment can help you get back to enjoying your life again.

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