

SACRAL NERVE STIMULATION

Patient Fact Sheet

What is sacral nerve stimulation?

Sacral nerve stimulation is an implanted system that stimulates the sacral nerves to help the bladder, urethra, and pelvic floor muscles work in better coordination.

What kind of patients are candidates for sacral nerve stimulation?

Sacral nerve stimulation is used to treat the symptoms of frequent urination, uncontrollable leaking, and incomplete emptying of the bladder in patients who have failed medications.

How does sacral nerve stimulation work?

No one knows exactly how sacral nerve stimulation works. One theory is that sacral nerve stimulation helps to calm down the bladder and the muscles responsible for normal emptying.

How do I know if sacral nerve stimulation will work for me?

Each patient has a trial to see if the therapy is effective. During this outpatient procedure, a lead is implanted and connected to an external battery, which is worn at the waist for several days. Success is evaluated as 50% or more improvement in symptoms during the test period.

How is the sacral nerve stimulation implant done?

If the trial is successful, outpatient surgery will be performed to connect the lead to an internal battery implanted in the upper buttock.

What does the stimulation feel like?

Stimulation varies from person to person, but most people describe it as a mild tingling sensation in the pelvic area.

What are the possible side effects of sacral nerve stimulation?

Side effects might include infection or allergic reaction at the surgical site, undesirable changes in stimulation, and shifting of the lead or battery from the original site.

Will objects in the environment interact with the stimulator?

Theft detectors (like those used in department stores) and screening devices (like those used at airports for security) may cause the system to turn on or off, or may cause what feels like an unexpected increase in stimulation. You will be given an identification card to show to security personnel indicating that you have an implanted device. It is unlikely that any type of home appliance will affect stimulation.

What restrictions will I have with a sacral nerve stimulator?

Patients are encouraged to resume normal daily activities, while keeping in mind that activities with a great deal of repetitive contact to the stimulator area may increase risk of damage to the system over time. Special precautions need to be taken for scuba diving, because this activity may cause damage to the system due to changes in atmospheric pressure.

Patients should notify medical personnel about the sacral nerve stimulator before procedures, and the device should be turned off. There are special considerations to be taken with heart defibrillators, pacemakers, lithotripsy, electrocautery, radiation therapy, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, diagnostic ultrasound, EKG, TENS units, pain pumps, and bone growth stimulators. No MRI or diathermy (a special kind of short wave, microwave, or therapeutic ultrasound treatment) should be performed with a sacral nerve stimulator because these procedures can cause damage to the device and injury to the patient.

How long does the sacral nerve stimulator last?

The sacral nerve stimulator battery is like any other battery used in everyday life. The lower the demands on the battery, the longer the battery power will last. Because individual programming needs vary, battery life will be different for each patient.

How is the sacral nerve stimulator battery changed?

When the battery reaches end of life, it can be changed in a simple outpatient surgical procedure. This procedure involves opening up the "pocket" in which the battery was implanted, disconnecting it from the lead, and replacing it with a new battery.

What is the patient's role in sacral nerve stimulation?

Patients are encouraged to follow the medical treatment plan recommended by their physician. This may include use of medications, physical therapy, or dietary changes to achieve the best response.

Patients with chronic medical conditions like diabetes, nervous system disorders, or back problems are encouraged to follow recommended medical care. Worsening of these conditions may affect urinary function in such a way that the sacral nerve stimulation is less effective in controlling symptoms.

Periodic reprogramming of the sacral nerve stimulator may be necessary as scar tissue heals the lead into place or accidents cause migration of the lead. Sacral nerve stimulation is intended to treat urinary symptoms to enable patients to regain control of their lives. It is important to remember that this form of therapy is to help symptoms, not cure them. Sacral nerve stimulation should be viewed as a lifelong form of therapy that may require adjustments and revisions during various stages of life.

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