

Patient information factsheet

Spinal cord stimulator implantation aftercare advice

We have given you this factsheet because you have had a spinal cord stimulator surgically implanted in your body. It explains what to expect after your procedure and how to recover well at home. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our neuromodulation team before you leave hospital or contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Please note that this factsheet is for advice only. It is not designed to replace any individual discussions you may have with your neuromodulation team.

Important information

Your wounds need time to settle before your spinal cord stimulator can be activated (turned on). We will arrange a follow-up appointment for you **two weeks** after your procedure with our neuromodulation clinical nurse specialist (CNS) team. At this appointment, we will check how your wounds are healing and activate your spinal cord stimulator, if appropriate.

Before you leave hospital

Before you leave hospital, we will give you:

- a handheld controller and charger for your spinal cord stimulator
- a prescription for pain relief medication (if needed)
- a stimulator ID card
- a manufacturer-issued information booklet

If you have not received any of the items above, please let us know before you leave hospital.

Eating and drinking

You can eat and drink as normal after your procedure. However, you may find that you have a reduced appetite. This is normal.

Managing pain

Your pain may initially feel worse after your procedure. This is normal. We will prescribe you pain relief medication to help ease this. It is important that you take the pain relief medication as prescribed to help speed up your recovery.

Any pain caused by the procedure should settle over the following weeks. As you recover, you should gradually reduce the amount of pain relief medication you take until you are back to your usual dosage.

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Please note that we will not amend your chronic pain relief medication dosage immediately after your procedure. We will discuss this with you further during your follow-up appointments.

If you have any concerns about pain or taking pain relief medication, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Caring for your wounds

During your procedure, your surgeon will have closed your wounds with some staples or stitches. These will need to be removed **seven days** after your procedure. We will provide you with a district nurse letter containing more information about this. **Please note that you will need to arrange an appointment to have your staples or stitches removed directly with your GP surgery.**

Before you leave hospital, we will:

- arrange a wound review appointment for you two weeks after your procedure (please see your appointment letter for more details)
- give you instructions on how to care for your wounds (including when to remove or replace any dressings)
- check your dressings (most people will not need further dressings, but we will provide you with some spares to take home just in case)

Contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet if you experience any of the following:

- redness, swelling or an increase in pain around your wounds
- any leakage of fluid on your dressings (this may be brown, green or clear)
- your wounds start to open after the staples or stitches have been removed

Washing

You should **not** have a bath or shower for seven days after your procedure (or until you have had your staples or stitches removed). After this time, you can bathe or shower as normal.

Exercise and physical activity

It is common to feel tired for four to six weeks after your procedure. To help you recover well, we recommend you:

- pace your activities (alternate rest with gentle movement)
- go for short walks (gradually increasing the length as you feel able)

You should **avoid**:

- standing or sitting for long periods (if this makes your pain worse)
- excessive bending, twisting, or overhead reaching or lifting while the leads heal in place (this typically takes 8 to 12 weeks, depending on the procedure you have had)

Returning to work

Most people will be able to return to work six to eight weeks after their procedure. However, you should only return to work when you feel comfortable and ready to do so.

You will be able to self-certify as sick for seven days. After that, your employer may want to see a medical certificate. Please ask us for a medical certificate (sick note) before you leave hospital. If you need an extended medical certificate, your general practitioner (GP) will be able to provide you with this. If you have any work-related concerns, please discuss these with us.

Sexual activity

You can resume sexual activity two to four weeks after your procedure. You should avoid positions which involve bending, stretching or twisting for 8 to 12 weeks, as this can cause movement of the leads during the initial recovery period.

Pregnancy

There is currently no clear clinical evidence regarding the safety of spinal cord stimulation (SCS) during pregnancy. As a precaution, our advice is that the spinal cord stimulator should be switched off throughout pregnancy. For more information about this, please contact us.

Driving

You may resume driving six weeks after your procedure once you:

- are back on your pre-procedure pain relief medication dosage
- feel comfortable to drive
- can safely perform an emergency stop

Further guidance about driving after having a spinal cord stimulator implanted can be found on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) website:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency

Travel

You may travel (including flying) once you feel well enough and your wound has fully healed. For most people, this usually takes at least six weeks.

When to seek urgent medical help

Contact our neuromodulation CNS team immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- a fever or high temperature (38°C or above)
- new numbness or tingling (which was not present before your procedure)
- difficulty passing urine (wee)
- worsening leg weakness or difficulty walking
- new bladder or bowel incontinence (accidental leakage of wee or poo)
- a severe headache or dizziness
- a persistent cough or coughing up phlegm (mucus)
- a significant increase in pain around the implant site

Outside of our working hours, contact your GP or NHS **111** for advice.

In an emergency, call **999** for an ambulance or go to your nearest emergency department.

Future considerations

Medical or surgical procedures

Some procedures are not safe to have if you have a spinal cord stimulator, including:

- electrosurgery and diathermy (surgical procedures that use heat from an electrical current to cut, remove, or destroy tissue and control bleeding during an operation)
- lithotripsy (a procedure that uses shock waves (sound waves) to break up kidney stones)
- radiotherapy (a treatment that uses radiation to kill cancer cells) close to the implant
- a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan (a scan that takes detailed pictures of the inside of your body), unless your spinal cord stimulator is confirmed as MRI-conditional, and your neuromodulation team have agreed you can safely have an MRI scan

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It is important that you make any healthcare professionals treating you aware that you have a spinal cord stimulator before having any type of procedure.

If you need to have a scan or a medical or surgical procedure in the future, please contact your neuromodulation team to ensure that the correct precautions are taken to protect both you and your spinal cord stimulator.

Magnets

Strong magnetic fields (for example, shop security gates and airport scanners) can cause your spinal cord stimulator to switch off. It is important that when you are out and about, you look out for any signs aimed at people with implanted cardiac pacemakers as this information will also apply to you.

If you have been near to a magnet, please check your handheld controller to make sure your spinal cord stimulator is turned on and working as normal. If you have any concerns about this, please contact us for advice.

Follow-up care

You may need several follow-up appointments with our neuromodulation CNS team after your procedure so that we can check and adjust your spinal cord stimulator settings. We will arrange any necessary appointments for you.

If you are unsure how to use your handheld controller, please contact us.

Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

Neuromodulation clinical nurse specialist (CNS) team

Telephone: **07799 861000** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm)

Email: neuromodulation@uhs.nhs.uk

For any non-medical queries (for example, rescheduling an appointment), please contact our SCS coordinator on **023 8120 5186** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 3pm).

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport