

## Patient information factsheet

# Understanding spinal cord stimulation (SCS)

We have given you this factsheet because you have been experiencing chronic pain. Your consultant (specialist doctor) believes spinal cord stimulation (SCS) may be a potential pain management option for you and has referred you to the specialist SCS team, to explore your suitability for the spinal cord stimulation pathway.

This factsheet explains what spinal cord stimulation (SCS) is and what the SCS pathway involves. We hope it helps to answer some of the initial questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please bring these with you to your first appointment.

Please read this factsheet and complete the questionnaires we have sent you as soon as possible.

### Important information

Please be aware that receiving this factsheet and the SCS questionnaires does not mean that you will receive SCS.

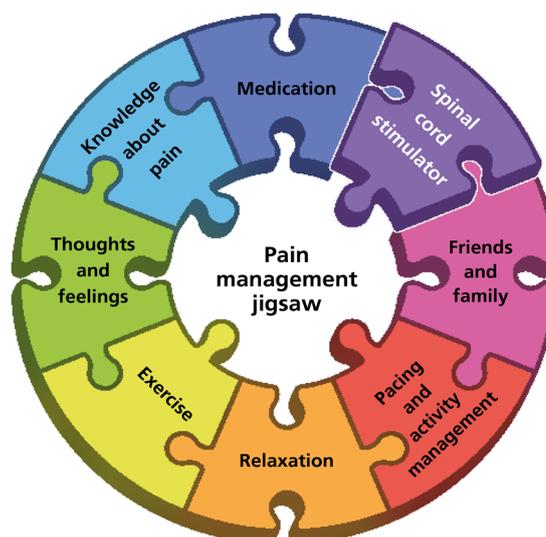
Reviewing a person's suitability for SCS is a long process which involves multiple assessments and discussions within our multidisciplinary team (MDT - a team of medical experts and health professionals). It may be that non-surgical pain management is more suitable for your specific condition and needs.

### What is spinal cord stimulation (SCS)?

Spinal cord stimulation is a pain management treatment option for people with chronic pain. It is intended to form part of a person's overall pain management plan rather than being a standalone treatment.

Pain management can be likened to a jigsaw puzzle made up of different pieces. These jigsaw pieces may include:

- exercise
- pacing and activity management
- medication
- mood management
- SCS



Every person's pain is unique and individual, even if they have the same underlying condition as someone else (for example, nerve pain following surgery). It is important therefore that a person's pain management plan is personalised to suit their specific needs. For some people, SCS may feature as part of their pain management plan, but for others, SCS may not be a suitable pain management option.

## How does SCS work?

The spinal cord is made up of nerves that can transmit pain signals. SCS works by targeting these nerves and blocking them from sending pain signals to your brain.

SCS involves the use of a medical device called a spinal cord stimulator, which is implanted under the skin (usually in the mid-to-lower back or neck). The procedure involves implanting leads into the spinal canal and a power source into the buttock area.

The spinal cord stimulator sends pulses of low-level electricity to the spinal cord. Stimulation changes the way pain signals are processed by the brain. For some people, the device can result in reduced pain.

## Is SCS suitable for everyone?

SCS is not suitable for everyone. We only recommend SCS for certain conditions in carefully selected people after other treatments, such as medication and exercise, have failed to provide adequate relief from their pain. It is also important to be aware that some people who appear suitable for SCS do not experience pain relief after having the SCS device implanted.

If SCS is not suitable for you, we will discharge you back to your pain team as we do not provide a pain management service.

## What are the benefits of SCS?

While SCS does not cure chronic pain, it can offer people a degree of relief from their pain, improving their quality of life.

A reduction in pain can help to:

- increase your overall level of activity
- improve your quality of sleep
- reduce the amount of pain relief medication you take

## What are the risks of SCS?

SCS is generally a safe procedure, but as with any surgical procedure there are possible risks. If we offer you a spinal cord stimulator, we will discuss all the potential risks with you in more detail. Please see below for a list of the potential risks.

### Device-related risks may include:

- no benefit from the device (not everyone finds SCS helpful)
- lead movement or breakage (if this happens, the device will not work as effectively as it should)
- scar tissue forming around the leads (this could reduce how effective the device is)
- device problems (for example, battery site pain or programming difficulties)

## General surgery-related risks may include:

- infection at the site of the implant or leads
- pain or discomfort at the surgical site
- bleeding or nerve irritation around the spinal cord
- complications from the anaesthetic (depending on your specific circumstances, you may be given local or general anaesthetic for your procedure)
- spinal fluid leak (**this is rare**) or other more serious complications

All treatment options carry some risks, but we work to minimise these and will only proceed with SCS if the potential benefits outweigh the risks for you.

## How effective is SCS?

The amount of pain relief someone will experience after having SCS will vary. While many people experience significant pain relief after implantation, it is important to understand that SCS will often not get rid of pain completely. The goal of SCS is to reduce your pain to a manageable level to help improve your quality of life. People who respond well to SCS often report better sleep, improved mood, and greater ability to do daily activities. Some people may find they no longer need to take pain relief medication at all after having a spinal cord stimulator, others may simply reduce the amount of medication they take.

## What does the SCS pathway involve?

### Assessment of suitability

After your consultant has sent your referral to our specialist SCS team, we will carry out an in-depth consultation to assess your pain and its effect on your day-to-day life.

During this assessment, we will:

- review the questionnaires you have completed
- provide information about SCS and answer any questions or concerns you may have
- discuss additional and alternative treatments where necessary



### Multidisciplinary (MDT) meeting

We will discuss all potential SCS cases within our wider multidisciplinary team (MDT). We will then make a final decision as to whether SCS is suitable for you or if you would benefit from an alternative treatment or management option.



### Implantation and aftercare

If we think SCS is suitable for you, we will send you more information about the next steps.

The surgical procedure to implant the SCS device may vary depending on your specific condition and needs. It may be either a one-stage or two-stage process. We will discuss this with you in more detail before your procedure.

After your procedure, you will need to attend appointments with our team for at least a year to optimise your therapy from the device. We will also ask you to complete a number of questionnaires to assess how effective the device is at improving your pain (these questionnaires will be similar to what we sent you at the beginning of the SCS pathway).

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## What happens next?

Once we have received your completed questionnaires, we will arrange an appointment for you with a member of our team.

## Useful links

### The British Pain Society

Stimulating the spinal cord to help with pain - information for patients

[www.britishpainsociety.org/static/uploads/resources/files/book\\_scs\\_patient.pdf](http://www.britishpainsociety.org/static/uploads/resources/files/book_scs_patient.pdf)

### National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

Spinal cord stimulation for chronic pain of neuropathic or ischaemic origin

[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA159](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA159)

## SCS devices

Please note that the following websites are commercial websites.

- Boston Scientific website: [www.controlyourpain.co.uk/home.html](http://www.controlyourpain.co.uk/home.html)
- Abbott Medical website: [www.neuromodulation.abbott/us/en/chronic-pain/support/resources.html](http://www.neuromodulation.abbott/us/en/chronic-pain/support/resources.html)
- Medtronic website: [www.medtronic.com/uk-en/patients/conditions/chronic-pain.html](http://www.medtronic.com/uk-en/patients/conditions/chronic-pain.html)
- Nevro (high-frequency SCS) website: [www.nevro.com](http://www.nevro.com)

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