

Spinal Cord Stimulator

A spinal cord stimulator (SCS) is an innovative mechanism used to manage chronic pain by blocking pain signals before they reach your brain. The small device has thin wires, or leads, that are placed into the epidural space in your back. The leads deliver low-voltage electrical pulses from a generator. The pulses interrupt the transmission of pain signals to your brain, which results in a reduction of pain or even a feeling of gentle massaging or pleasant sensations. The pulses can be regulated, and the system turned off and on, based on your specifications.

How is it beneficial?

The SCS may provide relief from chronic pain in your back, neck, arms or legs, when other treatments have been unsuccessful. It is especially beneficial because you may try out the system with a temporary device for 5 to 7 days. If you feel significant relief during the trial, you may choose to have a permanent system implanted. Many patients experience pain relief years after implantation, and experience a greater quality of life.

What can I expect?

For this short procedure, you receive a local anesthetic (or possibly light sedation), and the procedure site is numbed. The doctor inserts the leads into your back using a needle, and then positions them to the specific location of your pain. After the leads are in place, the doctor connects them to an external generator, which is taped to your back.

Following the procedure, there may be mild discomfort at the procedure site. While the procedure site heals, keep it dry and clean. Be sure to follow discharge instructions, and contact your doctor if drainage or redness occurs.

How soon will I feel relief?

Many patients feel relief shortly after the trial implementation procedure. If the trial SCS relieves your pain, you may choose to have a SCS permanently implanted. This must take place at a hospital or surgery center. This procedure involves implanting the generator in the abdomen or the buttocks, and adjusting the leads to provide the best pain relief and most coverage of the painful area. The system can be removed at a later time if necessary. Studies have shown that many patients experience pain relief for years after the original implant.