



Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS)

Patient Information Sheet

What is spinal cord stimulation?

Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) is a treatment used to help reduce **chronic pain**, especially pain that has not improved with medications, injections, or surgery.

It works by sending **gentle electrical signals** to the spinal cord. These signals change how pain messages are sent to the brain, which can reduce how much pain you feel.

SCS does **not cure** the cause of pain, but it can help **control pain** and improve daily function and quality of life.

What types of pain can SCS help?

SCS is most often used for:

- Chronic back or leg pain
- Nerve pain (burning, tingling, electric-type pain)
- Pain after spine surgery (sometimes called “failed back surgery syndrome”)
- Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)
- Certain types of peripheral neuropathy

Not everyone is a good candidate. Your pain doctor will help decide if SCS is appropriate for you.

How does spinal cord stimulation work?

- Thin wires called **leads** are placed near the spinal cord
- A small battery (generator) sends electrical signals to the leads
- The signals interfere with pain signals before they reach the brain

- Many patients feel **less pain**, even though the underlying condition remains

Some systems cause a mild tingling sensation, while newer systems may work without you feeling anything at all.

The two-step process

1. Trial phase

- A temporary system is placed for **5–7 days**
- No permanent implant at this stage
- You test how much pain relief you get
- A successful trial usually means **50% or more pain reduction**

If the trial helps, you may proceed to permanent implantation.

2. Permanent implant

- Leads are implanted near the spine
- A small battery is placed under the skin (usually in the buttock or abdomen)
- The system is programmed specifically for you
- Some batteries are rechargeable, others are not

What are the benefits of SCS?

- Reduced pain
- Improved ability to move and function
- Better sleep
- Possible reduction in pain medications
- Adjustable and reversible treatment

What are the risks?

As with any procedure, there are risks. These include:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Pain at the implant site
- Lead movement or breakage
- Device malfunction
- Incomplete pain relief
- Need for additional procedures or revisions

Serious complications are uncommon but possible.

What is recovery like?

- Most patients go home the same day
- Activity is limited for several weeks to allow healing
- Avoid heavy lifting, bending, or twisting at first
- The device can be adjusted over time to improve pain control

Will I still have pain?

Yes. SCS usually **reduces pain**, but it does not eliminate it completely. The goal is meaningful improvement in pain and function, not a cure.

Is spinal cord stimulation reversible?

Yes. The system can be turned off or removed if needed.

Is SCS covered by insurance?

In many cases, yes. Coverage depends on your diagnosis and insurance plan. Your clinic staff can help guide you through this process.

Questions or concerns?

If you have questions about spinal cord stimulation, please speak with your pain specialist. A detailed discussion is important to decide whether this treatment is right for you.

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