



The Kent Centre for Pain Medicine: Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS)

Information for patients

This leaflet will give you information about **Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS)** to help with the management of your chronic pain. If you have any questions, you should ask your pain consultant or other relevant healthcare professional.

Why have I been recommended for SCS?

It has been recommended by your pain consultant that you consider Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS) to help with the management of your chronic pain. Whilst SCS does not cure chronic pain it can help to reduce your pain when used alongside medications and other treatments.

As SCS insertion is a surgical procedure/operation it is important that you are fully informed of all risks and benefits before you decide that SCS is the right treatment for you.



What is Spinal Cord Stimulation and how does it work?

Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS) is used for the treatment of people who suffer from Chronic Neuropathic (nerve) Pain. The nerves in your spinal cord carry messages to your brain telling it you feel pain in certain areas.

By inserting a lead (electrode) inside the spine this enables an electric current to be applied to your spinal cord, interrupting the pain messages that are received by your brain. Depending on which system is used, you may feel a pleasant sensation (called 'paraesthesia'), which has been described as tingling, warm, or a pins and needles type sensation over the area of your pain. Alternatively, if 'High-frequency' stimulation is used, you may not feel any paraesthesia at all.

You are given a remote control which allows you to turn the stimulation on and off, switch between programmes, and to increase or decrease the sensation that you receive if appropriate. You cannot use the stimulation when driving a vehicle if you have paraesthesia.

This should eventually enable you to reduce the amount of painkillers that you need to help your pain. We aim to work with you so that you can control your pain and are able to increase your movement and exercise.

Who decides whether SCS is the right treatment for me?

There will be several appointments that you must attend once referred for the SCS by your pain consultant. You will need to see one of the clinical nurse specialists who will explain in more detail what is involved and give you an opportunity to ask questions.

You will then be referred to a psychologist who will aim to help you explore any thoughts, feelings, or expectations that you may have about having a SCS. The psychologist may also introduce you to some helpful psychological approaches, which may be of further help in helping you manage your pain. You will also be referred to an occupational therapist who will assess your functional abilities, including pacing of your activities before and after your procedure.

It is very important that you attend all appointments and that you complete all questionnaires that you will be given at these appointments. Throughout this process, your case will be discussed at our multidisciplinary chronic pain team meeting to make sure that SCS is the right treatment for you.

What happens once it is decided I am suitable for SCS?

Once the chronic pain team have decided that you are not only suitable for SCS but you are ready for one, you will be offered a temporary trial of the stimulation to see if it works for you. The team will decide which system they feel would be most appropriate for your pain.

What happens at the trial stage?

The trial stage is performed as a day case in the day surgery unit. The lead (either one or two) is inserted through a needle in the lower part of your back either under local anaesthetic (the area is numbed but you are awake) or general anaesthetic (you are asleep for the procedure).

The needle is removed leaving the end of the lead exposed underneath a dressing. This lead is connected to a small pulse generator (a battery the size of a pocket watch) which delivers your stimulation. You will be given a remote control which allows you to adjust the stimulation at home.

The trial stage lasts for two weeks after which you will come back to clinic to have the lead removed, which is painless. At this point, depending on how the trial has been, the team may decide to offer to extend your trial, using the same trial leads with a different system.

What does the permanent implant involve?

Should your trial be successful you will be scheduled to come back for the permanent implant at a later date. Please be aware that this will be several months after your trial.

This is similar to the trial procedure except this time the pulse generator is implanted under the skin either above your buttock or in your abdomen (stomach). The lead is tunneled under your skin and connected to the rechargeable implantable pulse generator so nothing is seen from the outside.

The procedure is carried out in day surgery, with sedation. Depending on how you are feeling immediately following your procedure you may be given programmes to use on the day, or you may be asked to return to the pain clinic a few days later for 'programming'.

You will also need to make an appointment with your GP surgery after your procedure to have your wounds checked, and any sutures (stitches) removed.

What are the risks?

As with any surgical procedure there are risks – your pain consultant will discuss these with you. Risks may include infection, bleeding, increased pain, and device malfunction.

Will I be totally pain free with SCS?

People differ in how much pain relief they achieve with SCS hence the reason for the trial but most people find this therapy helps the chronic pain they have suffered with for many years. If successful it is estimated that it could reduce your pain by half. In time it may mean that your pain medications can be reduced. You must check with your pain consultant or other relevant healthcare professional before changing the dosage of your medications.

What if I need to cancel/change my appointment?

If you cannot attend your appointment, please phone and tell us. Please give us at least 48 hours notice, to enable us to offer your appointment to another patient. If you need to cancel or change your appointment more than once, we will not be able to offer you a further appointment.

If you do not attend for your appointment and do not cancel it beforehand, we will have to return your referral to your GP and you will need to see them and ask to be referred again.

Further information

After reading this information, if you have any questions please contact the pain clinic.

Kent Centre for Pain Medicine

Contact details (direct line)

- Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury Telephone: 01227 783049
- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital, Margate Telephone: 01843 234456
- William Harvey Hospital, Ashford Telephone: 01233 616691

Useful information

For further information on spinal cord stimulation and to see a list of other East Kent Hospitals pain leaflets, please see the links below.

- British Pain Society. **Stimulating the spinal cord to help with pain: Information for patients.** April 2009.
www.britishpainsociety.org/static/uploads/resources/files/book_scs_patient.pdf
- **National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)** Guidelines www.nice.org.uk
- East Kent Hospitals. **Chronic pain patient information**
www.ekhft.nhs.uk/chronic-pain-leaflets

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145 or 01227 864314, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhft.nhs.uk/patientinformation