

Spinal Cord Stimulator Trials

Treatment for Chronic Back Pain

What are spinal cord stimulator trials?

Spinal cord stimulator trials are conducted by a physical medicine specialist and are the first stage of a treatment to help patients suffering from chronic back pain. Spinal cord stimulators are low-level electrical transmitters that deliver electrical impulses to the spinal cord to block pain from being perceived by the brain. Instead of feeling pain, the patient feels a mild tingling sensation.

Who should consider spinal cord stimulator trials?

If conservative treatments fail, or if pain persists after back surgery, a patient may want to consider a spinal cord stimulator trial. Conservative measures used to treat back pain include:

- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Strengthening/stretching exercises
- Rest and/or bracing
- Fluoroscopically guided injections

Stimulator trial period

During the stimulator trial period, which usually lasts one week, the patient is monitored to determine if the stimulator provides pain relief and if the patient is comfortable with the sensations provided by the spinal stimulator. Throughout the weeklong trial, patients are able to adjust the strength of the electrical stimulation from an external device.

How is the procedure performed?

A physical medicine specialist places the wires for the trial using fluoroscopic guidance. An epidural needle is placed near the spinal cord, where electrode wires are then inserted through the needle and attached to an external stimulator. During the procedure local numbing medications and sedatives are used to help the patient remain comfortable. However, patients are conscious during the procedure to allow the physical medicine specialist to adjust the stimulator to provide the most effective pain relief.

Post-procedure recovery

Following the procedure, patients remain in recovery for 30 minutes to ensure the patient is safe to leave. Patients should refrain from strenuous physical activity and exposing the stimulator to water.

What happens after the stimulator trial?

After the trial is complete, the patient returns to the office for a brief procedure, during which the electrodes from the trial are removed. The patient and the physical medicine specialist then decide whether or not to proceed with the permanent implant. If the trial was deemed successful, a neurosurgeon will be consulted to permanently implant the spinal cord stimulator.

Possible complications

In general, spinal cord stimulator trials are safe and complications are minimal. Rare complications include infection and nerve injury. Serious complications of stroke, paralysis and death have been reported but are extremely rare.

Precautions taken to minimize these risks include proper selection of patients for the procedure, evaluation of patients' health prior to selection, careful sedation of patients and constant monitoring of patients during the procedure.

Learn more

To learn whether a spinal cord stimulator trial is right for you, call Tri Rivers toll-free at 1-866-874-7483. You may also request an appointment at www.tririversortho.com by clicking the "Request an Appointment" link.



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