

WHAT IS SPINAL CORD STIMULATION?



Spinal cord stimulation (SCS) uses groundbreaking technology that works by introducing an electrical current into the epidural space near the source of chronic pain impulses. Under a local anesthetic and minimal sedation, a doctor will first place the trial SCS lead into the epidural space. The SCS lead, a soft, thin wire with electrical leads on its tip, is inserted into the epidural space through a needle in the patient's back. The trial stimulator is typically worn for 5 to 7 days as the lead is taped to the back and connected to a stimulating device. If the trial successfully relieves the pain, patients have the option to use the device on a permanent basis.

■ HOW DOES A SPINAL CORD STIMULATOR RELIEVE PAIN?

The implanted device near the area of pain produces a low-voltage current and creates a sensation that blocks the brain's ability to sense the previously perceived pain, even replacing those sensations with pleasant ones. The intensity of the stimulator can be changed, and the system can be turned on and off as necessary to provide optimal pain relief as experienced by the patient.

■ WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THIS PROCEDURE?

The stimulation trial is a short procedure, and implantation may be performed under light sedation or, less frequently, under general anesthesia. Often all that is needed is a local anesthetic to numb the area where the leads are inserted. During the procedure, one or more leads are placed in the space along the spinal cord. The leads are typically inserted using a needle. The exact placement depends upon the location of the pain. When the leads are positioned in the best location, they are connected to a portable external generator. Once connected, the system generates

mild electrical pulses that will be programmed to replace the areas of intense pain with a more pleasant sensation known as paresthesia.

■ WHEN WILL I BEGIN TO FEEL PAIN RELIEF AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

One benefit to SCS is that a trial is offered with a temporary device. If the patient receives significant relief during the trial period, they can go on to have a permanent SCS system implanted. For those it does help, SCS is an innovative treatment that can bring significant relief and improve their quality of life.

■ WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED RECOVERY FROM THE PROCEDURE?

Recovery from the procedure is short. You may have minor discomfort at the procedure site, which usually resolves within 24 hours. While the procedure site is healing, it is important to keep it dry and clean to prevent infection. If there is any drainage or redness at the site, you may have developed an infection and should be seen by your physician. You may also call Colorado Pain Care if there are any concerns.