

## What is This Therapy?

It is an implanted system that stimulates the sacral nerves to help the bladder, bowel, urethra, and pelvic floor muscles work in better coordination.

## Who are Candidates?

It helps patients with urinary frequency, urgency, bowel and bladder incontinence, and incomplete emptying of the bladder.

## How Does This Therapy Work?

It helps restore bladder and bowel function to as normal as possible with gentle stimulation to the sacral nerves.

## How Do I Know If This Therapy Will Work for Me?

Each patient has a test trial to see if the therapy is effective. The first stage of the test is done as an outpatient procedure and involves placement of a temporary lead wire, connecting it to an external battery, and worn at the waist for several days. Success is evaluated as 50% or more improvement in symptoms during this trial period. You may be asked to complete a voiding diary during this phase so to best measure improvement in symptoms. If success is achieved, you will go on to have permanent implantation of a stimulator device.

## How Is the Implant Done?

If the test trial is successful, an outpatient surgical procedure will be performed to connect a permanent lead from the area near the sacral nerves to an internal battery implanted in the upper buttock.

## What Does the Stimulation Feel Like?

Most people describe it as a slight pulling, tingling, or fluttering sensation in the pelvic area. It should not be painful. Stimulation settings can be adjusted, and sensations will vary from person to person.

## What are Some Possible Side Effects?

Pain at the implant site, an adverse change in bowel and bladder function.

## Will Objects In the Environment Interact with The Stimulator?

Theft detectors (like those used in department stores) and screening devices (like those used at airports for security) may cause the system to turn on or off, or may cause what feels like an unexpected increase in stimulation (you may want to turn off device when around this equipment). You will be given an identification card to show to security personnel indicating that you have an implanted device. It is unlikely that any type of home appliance will affect stimulation.

## What Restrictions Will I Have with My Stimulator?

Patients are encouraged to resume normal daily activities, while recognizing activities with a great deal of repetitive contact to the stimulator area may increase risk of damage to the system over time.

Patients should notify medical personnel about the sacral nerve stimulator before procedures, and ask if the device should be turned off. There are special considerations to be taken with heart defibrillators, pacemakers, lithotripsy, electrocautery, radiation therapy, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, diagnostic ultrasound, EKG, TENS units, pain pumps, and bone growth stimulators. No diathermy (a special kind of short wave, microwave, or therapeutic ultrasound treatment) should be performed with a sacral nerve stimulator because these

procedures can cause damage to the device and injury to the patient. Depending on what specific device is implanted will determine if MRI is compatible. Have your health care provider check with the manufacturer for more specific guidelines regarding MRI or other imaging considerations.

### **How Long Does the Stimulator Last?**

---

The sacral nerve stimulator battery is like any other battery used in everyday life. The lower the demands on the battery, the longer the battery power will last. Because individual programming needs vary, battery life will be different for each patient and a rechargeable battery option is also available.

### **How Is the Stimulator Battery Changed?**

---

When the battery reaches end of life, it can be changed with a simple outpatient surgical procedure. This procedure involves opening up the “pocket” in which the battery was implanted, disconnecting it from the lead, and replacing it with a new battery.

### **What Is My Role with This Therapy?**

---

It is important to follow the treatment plan agreed upon with your health care provider. This may include use of medications, physical therapy, or dietary changes to achieve the best response.

Sacral nerve stimulation effectiveness may be impacted by changes in your health. If you have chronic medical conditions like diabetes, nervous system disorders, or back problems, you will be encouraged to follow recommended medical care and notify your provider for any change in your health.

Periodic adjustment with an external clinician programmer and a personal hand held programmer may be necessary as scar tissue heals the lead into place or accidents may cause migration of the lead.

This therapy is intended to treat urinary and bowel problems and to improve your quality-of-life. It is important to remember that this is intended to help improve symptoms, not cure them. Report any trauma or injury to the battery site to your health care provider.

It should be viewed as a lifelong form of therapy that may require adjustments and revisions during various stages of life.

Reviewed and edited by: Jennifer Compton, PA-C, MHS and Glenn Sulley, BS, RN, CURN

### **References**

---

<https://www.medtronic.com/us-en/healthcare-professionals/therapies-procedures.html>  
<https://www.axonics.com/axonics-portal>

---

This material is for educational purposes only and should in no way be taken to be the practice or provision of medical, nursing or professional healthcare advice or services. The information should not be used in place of a visit, call, consultation or advice of your physician, nurse or other health care provider. The information obtained herein is not exhaustive and does not cover all aspects of the specific disease, ailment, physical condition or their treatments. Should you have any health care related questions, please call or see your physician, nurse or other health care provider promptly.

The Society of Urologic Nurses and Associates, Inc. is a professional organization committed to excellence in patient care standards and a continuum of quality care, clinical practice, and research through education of its members, patients, family, and community.