

# After Vagal Nerve Stimulator (VNS) Implant Surgery

## Information for patients going home after day surgery

Read this brochure to learn more about:

- What to expect when recovering after surgery
- How to take care of your incisions
- How to cope with pain
- What to do in case of emergency

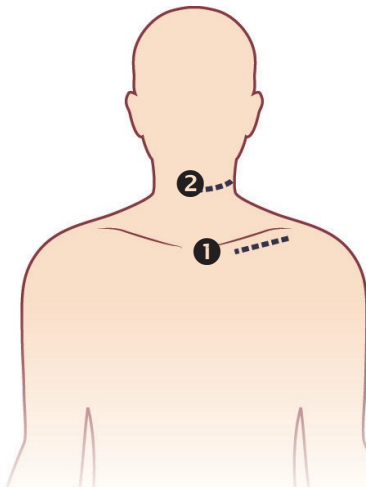


## Why did I have this surgery?

Your surgeon has implanted a vagal nerve stimulator (VNS) under the skin of your chest wall to help with your seizures. A VNS may help you to have shorter and fewer seizures or it may shorten the time it takes for you to recover from a seizure.

## What can I expect during the surgery?

The surgeon makes 2 cuts.



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- The first cut is on the left side of the chest for the VNS device. The VNS device is a flat, oval-shaped battery about the size of a silver dollar.
- A second cut is made on the neck to help the surgeon pass the wires from the stimulator to and around the vagus nerve.
- The surgery does not happen near or around your brain.
- The surgery usually lasts about 50 to 90 minutes.
- You will have a general anesthetic so you will be unconscious during the surgery.

## What can I expect after surgery?

You may have changes to your voice (such as a hoarse voice), and you may find that when you talk your words can be interrupted. You may also find that you have to clear your throat or cough often. These symptoms usually get better with time.

You may also have:

- headaches
- trouble sleeping
- indigestion
- muscle movements or twitching
- nausea (feeling like you will throw up) or vomiting (throwing up)
- changes in your sense of touch
- prickling or tingling of the skin

**If you have any of these symptoms, they will get better with time.**

### **Is my VNS programmed?**

The VNS is turned on and programmed in the operating room. Please see your neurologist about 2 weeks after your surgery for a follow-up visit. Your battery should last about 5 to 10 years, depending on the settings the doctor has ordered.

### **Can I take my regular medication?**

Go back to taking your regular daily medication, including your epilepsy medication.

Do not make ANY changes to your epilepsy medications. Your neurologist will tell you any changes that you have to make.

## **When can I eat or drink?**

You can go back to eating and drinking what you normally would.

- Slowly start by having fluids and soups on the day of the surgery. Then return to your usual meals the next day.
- If you feel nauseated (sick to your stomach) or you are vomiting, you can get anti-nausea medicine such as Gravol<sup>®</sup>. You can buy it from your pharmacy without a prescription.
- Take the anti-nausea medicine as directed and drink liquids until the nausea passes. Then slowly start to eat what you usually eat.

## **What activities can I do?**

- Rest at home on the day of surgery.
- Slowly return to your normal daily activities but avoid for
- 2 weeks strenuous exercises such as shoveling snow and gardening.
- Avoid heavy lifting for 2 weeks, anything over 10 pounds or 5 kilograms. For example, groceries, small children or pets.
- Avoid swimming or hot tubs for at least 3 months.
- Your doctor will tell you when you can go back to work and sports.

## **How do I care for my wound?**

- You will not have any staples or stitches after this surgery.
- Always keep your bandage (dressing) clean and dry.
- Remove your bandage 4 days after your surgery but be careful not to remove the steri-strips (small strips of white tape) that are below your dressing.
- The steri-strips should be left in place for 7 to 10 days. If they have not peeled off on their own, remove them and throw them away.
- Keep the wounds clean and dry at all times.

## **When can I take a shower or bath?**

You can take a short shower 4 days after your surgery, after you have removed your dressing.

You can wet the steri-strips, but be careful that they do not peel off. Use a gentle soap to clean the area. Pat the area dry with a clean towel. Remember to wear clean clothing after you shower.

## **How do I cope with pain?**

It is normal to have pain (for example, throat or neck pain and spasms) after this surgery. The pain should get better with time.

We may give you a prescription for pain medicine.

- Take it as prescribed by the surgeon.
- If you do not have a prescription for pain, you can take Tylenol® Extra Strength tablets as recommended on the bottle.

## **What if I get constipated?**

Pain medicine can make you constipated. If you have two or less bowel movements a week or if you have trouble having a bowel movement then you are constipated.

To prevent constipation:

- Drink 3 to 5 glasses of water every day (each glass should be about 8 ounces)
- Eat foods that are high in fibre (such as bran and fruit)
- If you have not had a bowel movement for 3 days, take 30 ml of Milk of Magnesia. You can buy this from your pharmacy without a prescription.

## **When is my follow-up visit?**

If you do not have a follow-up appointment, please call to schedule one. Your neurologist appointment will be 2 weeks after your VNS surgery.

**Remember to bring your patient kit with you.**

The surgeon and your neurologist will keep in close touch and will review your care together.

- Dr. T. Valiante, surgeon      Phone: 416 603 5460
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## **What problems should I watch for?**

**Go to the nearest emergency room if you have:**

- a fever (temperature over 38 °C)
- more redness, swelling, heat and tenderness to the incision sites
- than usual
- any smelly or yellow-green pus coming from the cuts the surgeon made
- stimulation that causes choking, breathing or swallowing problems
- the feeling that your heart is racing
- the feeling of being drowsy or sleepy and you're not able to stay awake

## Call your neurologist's office if:

- you have stimulation that becomes painful or irregular
- you have signs that the pulse generator may not be stimulating properly or that the device has stopped working because the battery is low

**Important:** Call your neurologist before you have any medical tests such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or any devices put in your body. Certain tests might affect the VNS or stop it from working properly.



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