



VNS (vagus nerve stimulation)

Innovative Therapy For Epilepsy and Major Depression



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Epilepsy (sometimes referred to as a seizure disorder) is a common chronic neurological condition characterized by recurrent epileptic seizures. Millions of people worldwide are affected by the disorder. Epilepsy is usually controlled, but not cured, with medication – although surgery may be considered in difficult cases.

Of the available treatments, either medical or surgical, seizures are controlled 70 to 80 percent of the time. For patients unresponsive to medications, seizure control remains elusive and continues to have a

significant impact on their personal and professional lives.

Epilepsy Treatments

Medical treatment for epilepsy consists of prescription anticonvulsive medication (Dilantin, Tegretol or Depakote). Medications are taken daily to prevent seizures, or reduce their frequency.

Surgical procedures include brain surgery to remove the source of the seizure, and a less invasive procedure – VNS (vagus nerve stimulation).

VNS therapy, demonstrated to be safe and effective for people with epilepsy, is an innovative long-term therapy for seizure control. VNS therapy is delivered via a small pacemaker-like device, implanted just under the skin in the left chest pocket. The device sends mild pulses of electrical stimulation to a large nerve (vagus nerve) in the neck.

The VNS device is implanted and tested in the operating room by a neurosurgeon. The procedure is done on an out-patient basis (23 hours or less). Patients are referred back to their neurologist to have the device turned on and programmed. Programming

and re-programming the VNS system is a painless procedure that takes only a few minutes in the doctor's office. Patients are seen by their neurologist for follow-up care on a routine basis. The manufacturer of the device recommends that patients visit their neurologists at least every six months throughout the life of the device.

The VNS system's battery usually lasts 5-6 years. Patients are referred back to a neurosurgeon if the device has to be replaced (usually because it is not effective) or when the battery runs out.

VNS for Depression

In addition to treating epilepsy, the VNS system is approved for the treatment of major depressive disorders including unipolar and bipolar disorder (manic depression). Most health plans consider VNS for depressive disorders experimental. Some health plans, however, are considering the VNS system for depressive disorders on a case by case basis.

Please consult with your personal physician to discuss whether you may be a candidate for the VNS system for the treatment of epilepsy or depressive disorder.