Other Treatments for Epilepsy

by Rick Alan

En Español (Spanish Version)

For Managing Epileptic Seizures

Vagus Nerve Stimulator

The vagus nerve stimulator is used in patients whose epileptic seizures are not well-controlled with medicine. The stimulator is a battery-powered device. It is surgically implanted under the skin, similar to the implantation of a pacemaker. It is connected to the vagus nerve and delivers short bursts of electricity to the brain via the vagus nerve in the neck.

This device helps to reduce the frequency of epileptic seizures. Improvement is often slow; it may take up to two years to see the full effect. Patients with a vagus nerve stimulator may need to stay on medicine, but can often reduce the dosage. The vagus nerve stimulator may also improve other symptoms, such as depression and level of alertness.

Batteries in the device usually need to be replaced every five years. This is done via an outpatient surgical procedure.

Side effects are mild, such as:

- Ear pain
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty swallowing
- Hoarseness
- Coughing
- Muscle twitching

When to Contact Your Doctor

Contact your doctor if you (or your child):

- Experience any unusual or severe symptoms or side effects
- Do not suffer any recurrence of epileptic seizures (Your treatment may be lessened or stopped.)
- Do not experience any decrease in epileptic seizures

REFERENCES:


Epilepsy Foundation website. Available at: http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/.
