

# Electrical stimulation – treatment to improve your continence

Your nurse has suggested that you may benefit from using an electrical stimulator device to improve your continence (ability to control when you pass urine). This leaflet explains what electrical stimulation involves and how to use the stimulation machine.

It is very important **that you read this information leaflet and the one provided by the manufacturer in the stimulation kit**. This will make sure you are doing everything right. If you have any questions, please speak to the nurse caring for you.

## What is electrical stimulation?

As a treatment for incontinence, electrical stimulation involves passing a small electrical current through the muscles around your bladder. This makes them contract and can therefore help to improve your pelvic floor muscle tone. It can also help to reduce your urgency to go to the toilet.

This leaflet does not explain what pelvic floor muscles or exercises are. Your nurse will have already explained this to you. Please ask for a copy of the leaflet **Pelvic floor exercises for women** if you would like more information on this.

Your nurse may have recommended electrical stimulation because you have difficulty finding or contracting your pelvic floor muscles. You may have already had treatment for incontinence and this is being suggested to improve your symptoms further. Alternatively, you may be recommended electrical stimulation at the same time as another treatment.

Electrical stimulation is offered in many physiotherapy and gynaecology departments and continence services in the NHS.

## What are the alternatives?

Other forms of treatment for incontinence include pelvic floor exercises, vaginal cones, bladder retraining, medication, and other general fluid and health promotion advice. Please ask questions if you are not sure what your treatment options are.

## What does the treatment involve?

Once you consent (agree) to have the treatment, we will loan you a stimulation machine from the hospital. We will also give you a vaginal probe for you to use with the stimulation machine. You must not share this with anyone else.

Your treatment course could last up to eight weeks, depending on your symptoms and progress. We will ask you to use the machine one to two times a day. Try to use it every day, but if you are unable to do that, use it at least four to five times a week.

Start with five minutes of electrical stimulation for each session for the first week. Progress to 10 minutes for each session in the second week, 15 minutes per session in the third week and then up to 20 minutes per session for the rest of your treatment. The machine turns off after 20 minutes.

## How do I use the machine?

Your nurse will carry out a thorough assessment and give you detailed instructions on how to use the machine correctly. The instructions below are given as a reminder should you forget what to do after you have left hospital.

1. Insert the battery into the machine. **Do not leave the battery in the machine for longer than a week at a time without using the machine.**
2. Insert the lead wires into channel A.
3. Put some lubricating jelly onto the metal parts of the vaginal probe, making sure that the surfaces are completely covered.
4. Insert the probe into your vagina with the metal parts facing each hip. Do not place it too far into your vagina. Your nurse will have explained how far to insert the probe. **Do not insert the probe into the vagina with the machine attached and turned on.**
5. Connect the wires on the vaginal probe to the machine.
6. Switch on the unit by pressing the power button on the top of the machine.
7. Press the programme button (PRG) and select the programme that has been chosen for you to use.
8. To start the programme, press the + button underneath A on the left side of the PRG button, and keep pressing it until you reach a comfortable intensity. You will experience a tingling sensation in your vagina when the machine is stimulating your pelvic floor muscles.
9. When you have learnt what it feels like to contract your pelvic floor muscles, contract them as the machine is working.
10. After use, turn off the machine.
11. First, remove the equipment cable and then the probe from your vagina.
12. Clean and dry the probe as instructed below and store with the stimulator machine.

**The programme chosen for me is:**

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Once you feel comfortable with the stimulation, work with the machine by contracting your pelvic floor muscles every time you feel the machine work. Also, continue with your own pelvic floor exercises three to four times during the day without the machine, if you can. Your nurse will have already explained how to perform pelvic floor exercises and may have given you the leaflet, **Pelvic floor exercises for women**. If not, please ask your nurse for a copy.

## Cleaning the vaginal probe

Your vaginal probe must be washed in warm soapy water at the end of each treatment. Take care not to get the wires wet. Dry the probe and store it safely with the stimulator machine until your next treatment.

## Are there any risks?

The treatment does not generally cause any problems. However, if you experience any of the following while using the machine, stop using it and contact your nurse:

- vaginal irritation
- pain
- bleeding.

## Can I use the machine while I am having my period?

Yes, if you feel comfortable doing so. However, if you have period-related cramps or pains, the electrical stimulation may make them worse. Your nurse specialist will discuss this with you in more detail.

## When should I not use the machine?

The nurse assessing you will make sure that it is safe for you to use the machine. However, there are certain situations or conditions which mean you should not have electrical stimulation. Please speak to your nurse if the following have not already been discussed and you have:

- a pacemaker
- a vaginal infection or a sore vagina
- diabetes
- haemophilia
- a history of pelvic cancer
- reduced skin sensation
- had a previous total hip or knee replacement
- or if you are pregnant or use a coil for contraceptive use that contains metal (a Mirena does not contain metal).

## Follow-up appointments

You will be given clinic appointments both during and after your treatment to check on your progress. Please always bring your vaginal probe with you to these appointments. **If you forget it, we will have to cancel your appointment or you will need to buy another probe, which costs £10. We are only able to give one probe to each patient due to their cost.**

### Contact us

If you have any questions, please contact the urogynaecology nurses on **0207 188 3671** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

Out of hours, please leave a message and a member of staff will call you back in working hours; alternatively please contact your GP or NHS 111.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### **Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### **Your comments and concerns**

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### **Language and accessible support services**

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### **NHS 111**

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111

### **NHS Choices**

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### **Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust**

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

**t:** 0800 731 0319 **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)

**w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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