
Department of Functional Neuroscience

Insertion of an Intrathecal Baclofen Pump

What is Intrathecal Baclofen?

Baclofen is a useful drug that relaxes muscles. You may have tried this drug before in the form of tablets and found it to be ineffective or the side effects too unpleasant. When Baclofen is put directly into your spinal fluid it can work very effectively and in turn, work at a much lower dose than when you take tablets. This also makes it likely that you will have fewer side effects. We use a pump to deliver this drug on a continuous basis. This pump is similar in size to a shoe polish tin, approximately seven centimetres in diameter and two and a half centimetres in depth.

Test dose admission

You have been referred here by your specialist managing your spasticity or your GP. We think that intrathecal baclofen (into your spinal fluid) will help manage your symptoms. We will plan for you to come into hospital to test out a dose..

You will probably only have to stay one day for this trial but we can arrange for an overnight bed in hospital if it is required. You will have a number of injections into the spinal fluid (lumbar punctures) and several assessments of your spasms/spasticity. You will be given a set of gradually increasing doses until an effective dose is found.

If the trial is successful we will arrange for you to meet the Consultant Neurosurgeon in clinic to discuss the operation and the risks involved. If the Neurosurgeon decides that you are suitable for surgery, he/his team will arrange for funding to be sought from your Primary Care Trust (PCT). The decision from the PCT can take several weeks or even months. When we hear that funding is approved, you will go onto the waiting list for surgery and you will be sent an admission date.

Implantation of the pump

You will be admitted to hospital for the pump implantation the day before surgery. You will have surgery in the operating theatre and you will be asleep for the whole procedure. You will be able to take your normal tablets for spasticity unless the Anaesthetist has told you not to. The pump is inserted into your tummy under a layer of fat. A tube, called a catheter, is tunnelled around your back into the spinal fluid.

The pump is programmed at the end of the procedure. It will begin to deliver the baclofen slowly at a very low dose. When you wake up, you will have two wounds, one on your tummy and one on your back.

Complications

As with all Neurosurgery, there is a risk of complications:

From the pump

- The pump may fail
- The catheter may leak, kink, disconnect or dislodge.

These are not very common. You will notice your spasms returning if this happens and it will require surgery to put it right.

- Headaches

These happen relatively frequently but will usually go after a few days without any treatment. You will need to drink plenty of fluids and rest lying flat until you feel better.

From the surgery:

- Infection
- CSF (cerebral spinal fluid) leaks
- Bleeding

These are not very common. They would require urgent medical treatment. We will advise you of the kinds of side effects to look out for:

From the drug:

There are a number of complications that can occur because of the drug. These include:

- Drowsiness
- Nausea
- Floppy arms and legs
- Dizziness
- Difficulty breathing
- Light headedness
- Fits

If you experience any of these, you must contact us or your GP immediately.

Discharge

When you have recovered, you will be able to go home. This is usually after two to three days in hospital. You will be able to carry on taking your normal dose of muscle relaxant tablets as the pump will remain at a very low dose. We will make an appointment for you to have a review of this dose as an outpatient with the Consultant in Rehabilitation. You will return to the clinic several times until you are comfortable with the dose and the Consultant in Rehabilitation will supervise the reduction in your tablets.

Additionally

The Consultant Neurosurgeon or Specialist Nurse will see you in clinic after six weeks to make sure your wound has healed and that you have recovered well.

The drug in the pump usually lasts for three to four months depending on how much you use each day. There is an alarm in the pump that will tell you if it is running out of drug. The pump is refilled during an appointment in the rehabilitation clinic. This is done using a special needle and takes about 30 minutes. The battery in the pump will last for five to seven years. When we replace it you will need another operation.

If you feel you would like to discuss this further please contact the Nurse Practitioner for this service using the contact details below.

Contact details

Clinical Nurse Practitioner Neurosurgery
Tel: 01223 245151 Bp 154-680

Consultant Neurosurgeon
Secretary Tel 01223 348434

Consultant in Rehabilitation
Secretary Tel 01223 21787



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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