



What is a vagus nerve stimulator (VNS)?

A vagus nerve stimulator (VNS) is a medical device that stimulates (send signals to) the vagus nerve in the neck.

- Your child's neurosurgeon will place it under the skin along the chest wall.
- A lead (covered thin wire) connects the device to the vagus nerve in the neck.
- Your child will have an incision (cut) on the neck and chest.

Why does my child need it?

A VNS may help decrease the number of seizures your child has.

- Your child's doctor will set it (program it) to stimulate the vagus nerve on its own 24 hours a day.
- You will be given a magnet to cause stimulation and make the device send signals to the vagus nerve when needed. The doctor will explain how and when to use this.

The device:

- **Does not take the place of your child's seizure medicine.** The doctor will tell you if you need to make any changes to your child's medicine.
- May last 4 to 8 years before it needs a new battery. This depends on the settings your child needs.

What are some possible side effects?

The possible side effects most often only last for a short time. They may include:

- Pain or discomfort in the throat
- Hoarseness (scratchy voice)
- Coughing
- Trouble swallowing
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Problems with the pulse generator

How do I care for the incision?

Neck incision

- If there are Steri-Strips, let them fall off on their own. This will take about 2 weeks.
- If there are staples:
 - Shower and wash the incision as advised by the doctor.
 - Put an antibiotic ointment on the incision as prescribed by your child's doctor. Most often, it is used 2 times each day for 3 days.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Vagus nerve stimulator (VNS), continued

- If there are sutures (stiches), remove the dressing (bandage) as advised by your child's doctor. After the dressing is removed:
 - Your child may shower as advised by the doctor.
 - Put an antibiotic ointment on the incision 2 times each day for 3 days.

Chest incision

- If there are Steri-Strips, let them fall off on their own. This will take about 2 weeks.
- If there are staples:
 - Shower and wash the incision as advised by the doctor.
 - Put an antibiotic ointment on the incision as prescribed by your child's doctor. Most often, it is used 2 times each day for 3 days.
- If there are sutures (stiches), remove the dressing (bandage) as advised by your child's doctor. After the dressing is removed:
 - Your child may shower as advised by the doctor.
 - Put an antibiotic ointment on the incision 2 times each day for 3 days.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if:

- The stimulation causes choking or trouble breathing or swallowing.
- Your child's seizures increase.
- You notice any signs of infection around the incision site. This could include redness, drainage or swelling.
- Your child has a fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher).

Also call your child's doctor if:

- Your child's voice is always hoarse or bothersome.
- You think the stimulator is not working well.
- Your child stops feeling the stimulator.
- Your child needs any X-rays or procedures, including an MRI. **Be sure to call before your child gets these tests.**
- You have questions or concerns about the device or your child.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.