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## What is a vagus nerve stimulator (VNS)?

A vagus nerve stimulator (VNS) is a 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 covered thin wire called a lead 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 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

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- 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.**