

Medical and Rehabilitation Psychology Associates

Why Do I Need Psychological Screening Before Surgery such as Spinal Cord Stimulation?

Spinal cord stimulation deploys an implanted device that sends electrical currents to block pain messages to your brain. The devices used are implanted in the patient around the spinal canal. Your referring physician will provide you (if he/she hasn't already) educational materials explaining the procedure as well as answer any questions you might have prior to surgery.

The idea of having a device implanted in the body can be stressful for some, even causing anxiety, so psychological screening for spinal cord stimulation is pursued, not because your physician is concerned you'll "lose your mind" due to the treatment, but to gauge the possibility that associated stress and anxiety might interfere with the treatment.

To Your Benefit

Psychological screening allows the psychologist to address your concerns and see how those concerns might impede therapeutic efficacy. When we know there are triggers, it is easier to talk about them and to dispel any anxiety you might have about treatment.

What Does the Screening Consist of?

Many people have never engaged with a professional in the field of psychology. The very idea of consulting with one can be a source of anxiety because they don't know what to expect.

"Psychological screening" can sound a little scary, so you can think of it as a conversation. During this conversation, you'll discuss your medical history, the history of your pain problem, family and social history, and any background concerning challenges managing alcohol or drug consumption.

You will also be asked if you've previously received any psychological counseling or treatment.

You will complete several health surveys to help us better understand how pain has affected you.

What If I Am Depressed or Anxious?

People with chronic pain issues requiring interventions like spinal cord stimulation are often depressed and anxious, so being depressed or anxious is not a roadblock to treatment. If you are anxious, depressed or irritable, it is important to reveal this during the psychological screening process, as this will help the psychologist and your treating physician intervene with medications and other strategies to improve your mental state.

Does Screening Stop SCS Candidates from Receiving the Procedure?

Most candidates for spinal cord stimulation go through to treatment. Only in instances where patients are having clear psychological difficulties such as psychosis (hallucinations), active plans for self-harm, disorganized thinking, untreated mental illness, or dementia is spinal cord stimulation ruled out. That is because it is possible that these candidates will have challenges following post-surgical requirements and instructions.

We hope this brief primer about psychological screening for spinal cord stimulation has answered any questions you have about the need for this pre-surgical step. There is little to be concerned about and the screening will direct your physician moving forward. Please ask the psychologist about any questions or concerns you might have.

We wish you the best!