

## Electrical Stimulation for the Pelvic Floor Muscles

### What is it?

Electrical stimulation may be used to help strengthen up the pelvic floor muscles if they are very weak. If your pelvic floor muscles are weak then you may not be able to feel them working when you try and contract them. Electrical stimulation should only be used on the advice of a qualified healthcare professional, such as a registered physiotherapist. The physiotherapist will always assess the strength of your pelvic floor muscles prior to its use and make sure that it is appropriate for you. It is a portable, hand held unit that is on loan to you from the hospital and the idea is that you try and use it every day with a probe that you will insert either into your vagina or your rectum. The probe is single patient use and your physiotherapist will give you advice on how to use and clean this.

### Why would I need Electrical Stimulation?

Electrical stimulation is a way of making the pelvic floor muscles contract for you. It is important to note that it is not a long term solution as it will only strengthen the muscles to the point of being able to contract against gravity. Once this level has been achieved, and you are able to contract the pelvic floor muscles yourself, electrical stimulation should be stopped and a comprehensive exercise programme will begin. Before electrical stimulation is prescribed you will be assessed by a pelvic health physiotherapist. If you are unable to contract your pelvic floor against gravity then they may recommend electrical stimulation as it is very difficult to strengthen muscles without it when they are this weak.

### What are the alternatives?

The alternatives would be to just continue with pelvic floor exercises alone but these may be ineffective as your muscles are so weak.

### What are the potential risks and side effects?

Your physiotherapist will go through all of the contraindications and precautions prior to the use of the electrical stimulation. The only risk therefore may be minor skin irritation and in some instances bleeding in which case the use of electrical stimulation should be stopped immediately. Sometimes symptoms may worsen initially with its use as the pelvic floor can become fatigued but this should settle as the muscles then begin to get stronger.

### What are the expected benefits of treatment?

It is hoped that electrical stimulation will make your pelvic floor muscles begin to be able to contract against gravity. It may take up to 3 months for this to happen and your physiotherapist may assess you during this time to monitor any progress that you are making. Once this has been achieved the electrical stimulation is stopped and a comprehensive exercise programme then started. However, electrical stimulation does not always work. If there is no improvement in strength then the physiotherapist will discuss with you what the next step may be in terms of continued exercise or an onward referral to another speciality for further review or input.

### What is involved in the procedure?

Your physiotherapist will set up two programmes for you on your unit and you will alternate between these two programmes, one on each day. They will last about 20 minutes and patients usually use the electrical stimulation machine when they are in bed. Your physiotherapist will

also show you how to connect the probe and insert it into your vagina or rectum and then how to use it. Electrical stimulation may not feel comfortable but it should never feel painful. You will also be given simple written instructions on how to operate the unit and how to wash and care for your single patient use probe.

The contraindications, precautions and safety advice will also be written down for you and you will also be asked to complete a loan agreement form as you will be required to look after the unit which is hospital property and bring it back in the condition to which it was loaned out to you so that it can be loaned out to other patients who also need it in the future.

### **How will I feel afterwards?**

You may feel tired afterwards as your muscles have been working hard. If you want to stop half way through then you can just switch off the machine.

### **Consent**

Although you consent for this treatment, you may at any time after that withdraw such consent. Please discuss this with your medical team.

### **Important information**

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

### **Your comments**

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

### **Hand hygiene**

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

If you have any concerns then please call 03001314700  
Or email [esht.mskphsiohelp@nhs.net](mailto:esht.mskphsiohelp@nhs.net)

### **Other formats**

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**Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

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The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

Physiotherapy

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