

Implanted vagus nerve stimulation for treatment-resistant depression

Information for the public

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There is not much good evidence about how well this procedure works for treatment-resistant depression in the short-term or over time. There are concerns about complications. This procedure can be used but only when patients are having regular checks to see how well it is working or if it has caused problems.

Depression is treatment resistant when symptoms have not improved after at least 2 standard treatments. In this procedure, a small electrical stimulator is put under the skin of the chest (through a small cut) and its wires are passed under the skin to the left side of the neck. The wires are connected to the vagus nerve, which carries electrical signals to the brain. The aim is to improve mood by sending signals to the brain through the vagus nerve.

The [NHS website](#) may be a good place to find out more. [NICE's information on interventional procedures guidance](#) has more about what a procedure is and how we assess them.

Is this procedure right for me?

If you've been offered this procedure, your healthcare professionals should discuss with you what is involved, and tell you about the risks and benefits. They should talk with you about your options, and listen carefully to your views and concerns. Your family can be involved too, if you wish. All of this should happen before you agree (consent) to have the procedure. You should also be told how to find more information about the procedure. Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Some questions to think about

- What does the procedure involve?
- What are the possible benefits? How likely am I to get them?
- What are the risks or side effects? How likely are they?
- What happens if the procedure doesn't work or something goes wrong?
- What happens if I don't want the procedure? Are there other treatments available?

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