

# Intrathecal Baclofen Pump Program

*At University of Washington Medical Center*

*This handout is for patients and families in the intrathecal baclofen pump program at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC). It explains the pump, the trial dose, and what to expect after implant surgery.*

## What is an intrathecal baclofen pump?

*Baclofen* is a medicine that relaxes muscles. It is often used for people who have spasticity, spasms, or high muscle tone. These symptoms may be caused by multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, or other nervous system issues.

The term *intrathecal* refers to the space around the spinal cord. An intrathecal baclofen pump delivers medicine right to the target site in the spinal cord. It is an effective way to deliver the medicine.

## How does the pump work?

During surgery, a metal pump that contains baclofen is implanted beneath the skin on your belly. A small tube (*catheter*) runs from the pump to your spinal cord. The pump delivers the medicine directly to where it is needed.



## Will the pump help me?

An intrathecal baclofen pump can be very helpful if:

- You have spasticity or spasms in your legs or belly
- Your issues cannot be controlled by oral medicines, injections, or other treatments

*The intrathecal pump is implanted during surgery.*

## How will I know if the pump is right for me?

We will meet with you to talk about the pump. We want to make sure that it is the best treatment for you.

We also want to make sure there aren't any reasons that the pump would not work for you. You should **not** get a pump if you have:

- Trouble getting to and from your clinic visits
- An allergy to baclofen
- Current skin or nervous system infection
- Other reasons that make the implant surgery too risky

If you and your care team believe that you could benefit from a baclofen pump, we will set up a time for you to receive a trial dose of intrathecal baclofen.

### **What happens during the trial?**

It may take 1 to 2 months to get the trial set up. First, we need to get approval from your health insurance. We also need to find a date that works for all of the providers.

On the day of the trial:

- Do **not** take your oral medicines for spasticity or spasm. These medicines might be baclofen, tizanidine, diazepam, or dantrolene.
- Bring your medicines with you to the hospital. You may need to take them after the trial, before you leave the hospital.
- Expect to be at the hospital for 6 to 8 hours.

At the hospital:

- First, a Rehabilitation Medicine doctor and a physical therapist will evaluate your muscle tone and mobility.
- Next, an anesthesiologist will inject a dose of baclofen into your low back.
- Over the next 4 hours, the physical therapist and the Rehabilitation Medicine doctor will check to see how your muscles respond to the injection.

### **What happens after the trial?**

Your care team will review the results of your intrathecal baclofen trial. You may benefit from having a pump placed if:

- Your muscle tone improves during the trial
- You do not have bad side effects

If the trial worked well, you will meet with a neurosurgeon to talk about the implant surgery. Please know that you may need to be in the hospital for 1 to 10 days after surgery.

## What can I expect after the surgery?

### Follow-up Visits

After your surgery to implant the pump, you will have:

- 1 or 2 follow-up visits in the Neurosurgery Clinic to make you are healing well
- Visits in the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic every 1 to 2 weeks to adjust the pump as needed

It may take several months to find the best dose for you. You may need to visit the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic every 1 to 2 weeks for a couple of months. After that, you may see us 1 to 2 times a month for a few more months.

### Pump Care and Refills

- Depending on your dose, you will need to have the pump refilled with baclofen every 1 to 6 months.
- Do **not** miss your refill visits. If you do, you may have baclofen withdrawal and need emergency treatment. If you need to cancel or reschedule a refill visit, you **must** call the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic nurse at 206.598.2376.
- If you have concerns about pump site infection, baclofen overdose or withdrawal, or if you think the pump is not working, call one of the numbers listed on page 4 under “What if I have questions or problems?” After you call, you will need to come to the UWMC Emergency Room.
- Your pump may sound an alarm if there is a problem with how it is working. If you hear an alarm come from your pump, come to the UWMC Emergency Room to be assessed.

### MRI Scans

If you need to have a *magnetic resonance imaging* (MRI) scan, our Rehabilitation nurse will need to check the pump afterward.

- If you plan to have an MRI, call the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic nurse at 206.598.2376.

- Schedule your MRI on a weekday morning. You must come to the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic in the afternoon **on the same day**.

### **What if I have questions or concerns?**

- For questions and concerns weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic nurse at 206.598.2376.
- For urgent concerns after hours or on weekends or holidays, call 206.598.3300. Ask to page the Rehabilitation Medicine resident on call.

#### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., call the Rehabilitation Medicine Clinic: 206.598.2376

After hours and on holidays and weekends, call 206.598.3300 and ask to page the Rehabilitation Medicine resident on call.