

New therapy provides hope for millions of people suffering from bowel incontinence

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A new procedure is now available for the treatment of chronic bowel incontinence, a disorder impacting the lives of more than 18 million Americans. The treatment, called InterStim Therapy is a minimally invasive procedure which uses electrical impulses to stimulate the sacral nerve and improve muscle function. It is one of the only effective long-term treatments for bowel incontinence available to patients and Northwestern Memorial Hospital is one of the first medical centers in the country to offer the procedure.

"Bowel control problems can have a significant, detrimental effect on a person's emotional well-being," said Anne-Marie Boller, MD, a colon rectal surgeon at Northwestern Memorial. "Patients often struggle with everyday activities and withdraw from social interactions due to embarrassment or fear, causing them to suffer in silence. This treatment is a tremendous advancement that has the potential to improve patients' bowel control and their quality of life."

InterStim Therapy has been shown to reduce or eliminate bowel incontinence in 80 percent of patients according to recent studies. The treatment involves three steps: test stimulation, surgical implant and post-implant follow up. During the first phase, a thin wire is placed to stimulate the sacral nerve. This allows doctors to determine if the patient is likely to benefit from the therapy before moving forward with the full procedure. If the trial phase is successful, a long-term neurostimulator device, similar to a pacemaker, is then implanted in the buttock. The device has adjustable settings that can be tailored to the patient needs,

and over time can be controlled by the patient using a programmer which works like a remote control. The [final phase](#) is follow-up monitoring.

"Until now, few treatments have been successful in treating bowel incontinence," said Amy Halverson, MD, a colon rectal surgeon at Northwestern Memorial. "This is an exciting new option that will give many patients their freedom back by eliminating symptoms. We are excited to be able to offer this to patients."

InterStim Therapy, previously available for treating symptoms of overactive bladder was recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for fecal incontinence. "We have been waiting for FDA approval for almost ten years for bowel control use, many of our patients had to seek treatment in other countries where the therapy was already approved," added Boller also an assistant professor of surgery in the division of gastrointestinal and oncologic surgery at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. To date, more than 85,000 people have received InterStim Therapy worldwide.

Physicians tout the ability to determine the probable success of the therapy before committing to the full procedure as one of the many benefits.

Fecal incontinence is most common in adults, predominately women, and is not a normal part of aging. The disorder can be caused by a variety of factors, including damage to the nerves or muscles in the anal canal and sphincter from trauma such as childbirth, or other pelvic health disorders.

"People should not be embarrassed and should not dismiss symptoms because they think it is a normal sign of getting older," said Halverson who is also an associate professor of surgery in the division of gastrointestinal and oncologic surgery at Feinberg School of Medicine.

"Bowel incontinence may be unpleasant, but thanks to new therapies, you can stop symptoms and take back control of your life," said Boller.

More information: Halverson and Boller are among the only physicians in the Chicago area offering this procedure. For more information, please visit the Northwestern Integrated Pelvic Health Program or call 312-926-0779.

Provided by Northwestern Memorial Hospital

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