



UROLOGIC INSTITUTE

PATIENT PROFILE

Transformational Care for a Palm Springs Woman: *“It’s a game changer.”*



PATIENT

32-years old,
Palm Springs, CA



ISSUE

Urgency-related
Incontinence



RESULTS

Daily bathroom visits greatly
reduced, quality of life improved

By Ema Sasic
Palm Springs Desert Sun

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/health/2022/11/09/palm-springs-woman-finds-relief-incontinence-bladder-pacemaker/10655462002/>

For the first time in her life, Kristin Hunter is looking forward to road trips and exploring the vast landscape around her.

It’s not that she didn’t enjoy traveling before, or that she was banned from trips for asking the dreaded question “Are we there yet?” Instead, the question on her mind was always, “Where’s the nearest bathroom?”

Hunter, a 32-year-old Palm Springs resident, has struggled with urgency-related incontinence for as long as she can remember, and typically visited restrooms upwards of 25 times a day. Her disability, as she calls it, has disrupted her work, social life and sleep.

“It impacts my life in almost every aspect, whether I want to acknowledge it or not,” she said.

After years of trying different medications, but with no signs of improvements, Hunter thought she would never be able to find relief. But doctors at the Urologic Institute, with offices in La Quinta, Palm Desert and Palm Springs, implanted a tiny device, called the Axonics System, that acts as a “pacemaker” to correct a faulty nerve connection between her bladder and brain. Those 25 daily trips to the restroom have dwindled to around 10 ever since.

The implant has been a “game changer” for Hunter, who now can plan long drives without having to constantly think about needing a restroom every 30 minutes. By sharing her story, she hopes others who struggle with similar issues learn about a possible option available for them in their community.

‘STRESSFUL JUST TO LIVE LIFE’

Incontinence is very common, and often among women due to anatomical effects, such as a hysterectomy, pregnancy and childbirth, according to Urologic Institute Medical Director Dr. Pedram Ilbeigi.

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There are different types, such as stress incontinence, which puts stress on one's system by sneezing or coughing, for example, or urgency-related incontinence, where there's no anatomical reasons for the issue, "but functionally their bladder is hypersensitive to all sorts of irritants, such as coffee, alcohol, carbonated beverages, chocolate, spicy food," Ilbeigi said.

Normally patients start by making behavioral changes to limit irritants and see if there's an improvement before medications are considered, Ilbeigi said. Often times, however, medications are costly and may lead to side effects or other problems.

In Hunter's case, it's been a struggle her entire life. In any restaurant, grocery store, movie theater or gas station, she immediately searches for the bathroom to be ready when the urge to go strikes. It's affected her from when she was in school — before teachers understood her struggle, they accused her of skipping class because she had to use the restroom every period — to now at work.

Kristin Hunter hopes to go on a multi-hour drive along the California coast with her motorcycle following her bladder "pacemaker" implant.

"My position is pulling packages off a moving belt and loading trucks with people in front of me and behind me, so going to the bathroom every 30 minutes is not really an option," Hunter said.

She started dehydrating herself, she said, hoping to reduce the number of times she had to use the bathroom, but it still didn't help. Her incontinence was keeping her from sleeping well, hanging out with friends and advancing her career, because she wants to be a driver but can't break off from her route frequently.

But most of all, she felt alone in the fight. She didn't know anyone else with the same problem until she saw bladder medication commercials. "I was like, 'Oh my God, other people have this problem?'" she thought after seeing the TV ads.

"I've had times where I have peed to where it's soaked up the pad and the natural one in my underwear, and I have to throw them away. Even the smallest dribble you can smell," Hunter said. "It was very embarrassing, stressful just to live life."

*"Moral of life:
I can have one now."*

– Kristin Hunter

URINARY INCONTINENCE CAN AFFECT EVERYONE

It is estimated that

423M PEOPLE

people worldwide (20 years and older) experience some form of urinary incontinence¹

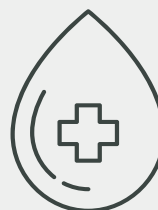


Urine incontinence affects

24 - 45%

of adult women.²

4 SYMPTOMS OF AN OVERACTIVE BLADDER



- Frequency
- Urgency
- Needing to go to the toilet more than once at night
- Urge incontinence

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A study on 129 participants who had a similar implant showed that 89% reported a reduction in urinary urgency incontinence after one year. Their quality of life improved as well.

Hunter has taken a number of medications over her lifetime to try to address her incontinence, but none of them have worked, she said. One helped limit her urine frequency, but also affected her bowels, which led to an emergency room visit.

Ready to resign the search for relief, one day Hunter came across a flyer for the device that would change her life.

A NEW PROCEDURE

The tiny device acts almost like a pacemaker for the bladder. A neurostimulator is connected to a lead, or a thin wire, that is placed adjacent to a sacral nerve root in the spine. The lead delivers electrical pulses that modulate the activity of the sacral nerve, which controls pelvic organs like the bladder and bowel.

“Rather than letting it do its thing, we take over the frequency. We’re able to modulate how the bladder behaves,” Ilbeigi explained.

Hunter first underwent a trial simulating what it would be like if she had the full system implant. She had to take note how many times she used the bathroom for a few days, but she noticed almost immediate improvement.

“I urinated after the procedure. ... I went home, and stuff’s just going on and on, and I looked down and noticed I hadn’t urinated in four hours. I was like, ‘Holy cow!’” Hunt-

er said. “I went from 25 times a day to like 10, and I slept actually in REM the whole night.”

An artist’s rendering shows the “pacemaker” for the bladder. A neurostimulator is connected to a lead, or a thin wire, that is placed adjacent to a sacral nerve root in the spine. The lead delivers electrical pulses that modulate the activity of the sacral nerve, which controls pelvic organs like the bladder and bowel.

Hunter could also adjust the pulse frequency of the device if she noticed she was urinating too much or too little in a day. For the most part, Ilbeigi said once the frequency is set, people usually forget about it.

Hunter passed the trial, “meaning she had significant relief without any side effects,” Ilbeigi explained, and they decided to move forward with a full device implant in July.

The medical director said the technology for this kind of device wasn’t around 20 years and wasn’t as readily available 10 years ago. Today, many progressive clinics, private practices or academia are utilizing it, but old-school urologists or gynecologists still haven’t engaged in this type of technology. That is mostly due to lack of time or interest in wanting to learn how to implement it, Ilbeigi said.

Out of the 11-man group at the Urologic Institute, six are capable of implementing the device. Ilbeigi estimated that the practice does about 85% to 90% of all implants in the Coachella Valley.

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Health insurance will usually drive whether or not someone can go through with the procedure as it can be costly. Typically people will go through more conservative options first and show they failed before insurance would green-light this option.

"It's not for everyone, but for the right person, it changes their lives," he said.

A study on 129 participants who had a similar implant showed that 89% reported a reduction in urinary urgency incontinence after one year. Their quality of life improved as well.

'GAME CHANGER'

Hunter has experienced a number of positive changes in her life since receiving her implant.

Recently, she went on a road trip around Los Angeles and visited Santa Monica, Hollywood, the Griffith Observatory and Beverly Hills all without needing to use the restroom.

With her newfound freedom, Hunter's dream is to drive along the Pacific Coast Highway from Santa Monica to San Francisco on her motorcycle — a route that can take upwards of eight hours. She also now has an opportunity to tour in the mountains with friends, something she constantly had to turn down before.

Kristin Hunter visited the Griffith Observatory during a recent road trip through Los Angeles.

"You get in packs of two to 20, and one person needing to pee every 30 minutes is going to hold everybody up," she said. "When friends asked, I'd be like, 'Hey, that sounds so much fun, but I'm going to pass.'"

Hunter still has kept many of her habits, such as using the restroom before she leaves the house or keeping a roll of toilet paper in her car just in case, but her whole outlook on life has shifted. She hopes it can happen to other people too.

"It's a game changer. I feel more youthful, more energetic," she said. "Morale of life: I can have one now." ■

¹Irwin DE, Kopp ZS, Agatep B, Milsom I, Abrams P. Worldwide prevalence estimates of lower urinary tract symptoms, overactive bladder, urinary incontinence and bladder outlet obstruction. *BJU Int.* 2011 Oct;108(7):1132-8.

²Buckley BS, Lapitan MC., Epidemiology Committee of the Fourth International Consultation on Incontinence, Paris, 2008. Prevalence of urinary incontinence in men, women, and children--current evidence: findings of the Fourth International Consultation on Incontinence. *Urology.* 2010 Aug;76(2):265-70.

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