

How to Manage a Nerve Block Infusion at Home

How to Manage a Nerve Block Infusion at Home

Pain control is an important part of your recovery after surgery. When you are discharged from the hospital, you will have a nerve block infusion. This pamphlet explains how a nerve block infusion works.

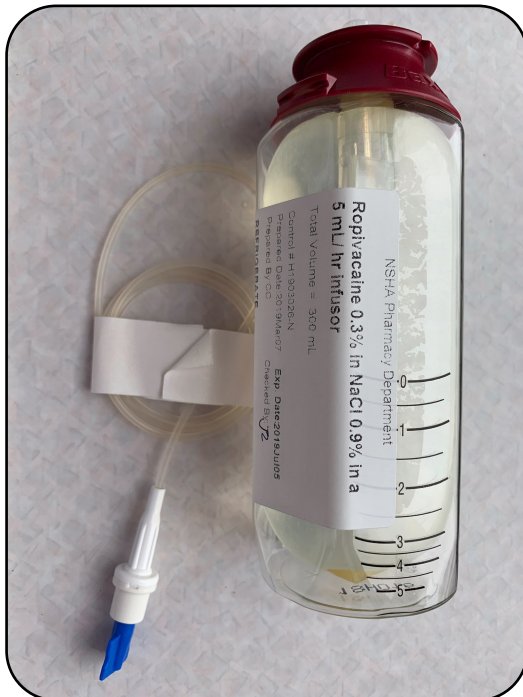
A nerve block infusion gives you safe, effective (works well) pain control after you leave the hospital.

What is a nerve block infusion?

- A nerve block infusion is a way of getting a medication called a **local anesthetic**. It is given by an anesthetist (a doctor who gives you medication to put you to sleep for surgery or to numb [freeze] a part of your body so you do not feel pain).
- The medication numbs the nerves that go to the area where you had surgery. This blocks the pain signals from the nerves in this area so they do not reach your brain. This is like the medication a dentist uses to numb your mouth.
- The nerve block infusion will cause the surgery area to feel numb for about 2 ½ days after your surgery.

How does a nerve block infusion work?

- Before your surgery, an anesthetist will put in a catheter (a thin, hollow tube) near the nerves in the surgery area. The catheter will be held in place by small pieces of tape and a clear, plastic dressing.
- The catheter will be attached to a pump filled with numbing medication. The medication will flow from the pump, through the tube, to your nerves. This flow of medication is called an **infusion**.
- The pump can hold enough medication to last for about 2 ½ days.



What do I need to know about the pump?

- The pump does not need to be plugged in. It works with your body heat.
- You cannot accidentally change the program.
- **Do not put anything hot or cold (like a heating pad, a hot water bottle, or an ice pack) on your nerve block dressing.**
- Make sure the catheter is not stretched or bent.

If the catheter comes away from the pump, call the Acute Pain Service doctor right away:

› Phone: 902-222-1938

What do I do if the catheter pulls out of my skin?

- The catheter may pull out of your skin if:
 - › the dressing gets loose.
 - › you move your arm or leg too much.
- If this happens, the numbing medication will no longer reach your nerves, and the numbness will wear off.
- If the dressing gets loose, put a new one on top to keep the catheter in place. We will give you a few dressings to take with you.

What do I need to know about the numbing medication?

- You may not be able, or barely be able, to move your fingers or toes while the pump is giving you medication. This is normal.
- It is normal to have more feeling in some areas of your arm or leg than others while the medication is working.
- Not all areas are affected equally by the nerve block. **You may still feel pain.** When you feel pain, take your pain medication as told by your pharmacist.
 - › You will be given a prescription for pain medication before you leave the hospital. **It is very important to have the prescription filled at the drugstore before you leave the hospital. You will need to have this medication available to take as soon as you start to feel pain.**
 - › When you take pain medication, it can take up to 1 hour before it starts helping your pain.

What do I need to do after I leave the hospital?

- Protect your arm or leg. Because it is numb, you will not feel pain or temperature changes. Make sure your fingers or toes are not touching anything hot or cold.
 - Most of your arm or leg will be covered with a cast or a dressing. Check the parts of your arm or leg that you can see to be sure they are not touching anything that could hurt them.
- Check the spot where the catheter enters your skin **2 times a day**.
 - › If you had foot or ankle surgery, the catheter will go into your skin near the back or side of your knee.
 - › If you had shoulder or arm surgery, the catheter will be taped near your neck or upper arm.
 - **If the skin is red, puffy, or hurts, call the Acute Pain Service right away:**
 - › Phone: 902-222-1938
- Keep the clear dressing over the catheter dry and in place.

- Sometimes, a bit of medication may leak out of the catheter. This may cause some wetness under the dressing. **If this happens:**
 - › Cover the dressing with gauze and tape, or put a new dressing on top.
 - › **Do not try to take off the dressing.**
- **If you have pain and you feel like the catheter has come out, call the Acute Pain Service doctor:**
 - › Phone: 902-222-1938
- **Do not drive while your arm or leg is numb.**
- Use a walking aid (like crutches, a cane, or a walker) when you walk, if needed.

How do I take out the catheter?

- The catheter should be taken out when the pump is empty. Usually this is about 2 ½ days after the pump is connected.
- **There are no needles in your skin.** There is only a thin, hollow tube.

To take out the catheter:

1. Wash your hands well.
2. Pull off the dressing.
3. Pull off the strips of tape from your skin.
4. Gently pull out the catheter. It should come out easily and with little discomfort. It should not hurt.
 - › **If you have a lot of pain, or you are not able to take out the catheter**, call the Acute Pain Service doctor at 902-222-1938.
5. Look for the coloured tip at the end of the catheter. If you see the coloured tip, throw the catheter and the pump in the garbage.
6. If you do not see the coloured tip, or if you feel that something has gone wrong while taking out the catheter, put the catheter in a plastic bag and call the Acute Pain Service doctor at 902-222-1938. We may need to see the catheter.

Call the Acute Pain Service doctor right away at 902-222-1938 if:

- You have tingling around your mouth or tongue, feel lightheaded, or have ringing in your ears.
 - › This may be a sign you are getting too much numbing medication.
- You have pain that is not being controlled by the nerve block pump or by your pain medication
- The area where the catheter goes into your skin is red, puffy, or hurts
- The catheter comes away from the pump or pulls out of your skin
- You are not able to take out the catheter

- **A member of the Acute Pain Service will call you at home every day until you have taken out your catheter.**
- They will ask you questions like:
 - › How does your skin look where the catheter goes in?
 - › Is the level of medication in the pump going down?
 - › How is your pain?
 - › Have you started taking your pain medication?
 - › Did you see the coloured tip on the end of the catheter when you pulled it out?

If you have any questions at any time, call the Acute Pain Service (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week):

› Phone: 902-222-1938

- Your nerve block was started on _____ at _____ a.m./p.m.
- Your nerve block pump should be empty on _____ around _____ a.m./p.m.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Acute Pain Service, QE II
Designed and Managed by: Library Services

PM85-1356 © December 2025 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed December 2028 or sooner, if needed.
Learn more: <https://library.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources>