

Managing Pain After Surgery with a Nerve Block

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What is a nerve block?

A nerve block sends local anesthetic (freezing) through a small needle to a spot near your nerves. This makes the part of your body being operated on feel numb and weak. It is similar to what a dentist uses to numb your mouth for dental work.

Why do I need a nerve block?

- You should be fully comfortable during surgery.
- For some types of surgery, like abdominal (stomach) surgery, you need a general anesthetic (medication to put you to sleep during surgery).
- If you are having surgery on your arm or your leg, you can have a nerve block to:
 - › Prevent pain during surgery
 - › Have less pain after surgery
- Sometimes, a person only needs a nerve block to be comfortable, instead of needing a general anesthetic.

- Having a nerve block may be a safer choice for you if you:
 - › Have many medical problems
 - › Have had side effects from a general anesthetic
- Your anesthesiologist (a doctor who puts you to sleep for your surgery) may also give you a sedative (medication to help you relax and fall asleep). This may make you tired enough to sleep during your surgery.

Can I choose not to have a nerve block?

- Yes. We want to help you make the best choice for you and your surgery. You are the one who will make the final choice.
- For some medical problems, general anesthesia may be much more risky than a nerve block. In these cases, your anesthesiologist may recommend that you have a nerve block instead.
- It is important to understand the risks and benefits of any procedure that is offered to you. Your anesthesiologist will be available to answer any questions you may have.

When will I get the nerve block?

You will get the nerve block just before your surgery. This will be done in the Block Room or in the Operating Room (O.R.).

How is a nerve block done?

- The anesthesiologist will clean and numb the skin around the area where you will have the nerve block.
- They may give you a sedative.
- They will find the right nerves using:
 - › A special needle
 - › A machine called a nerve stimulator
 - › An ultrasound machine (shows pictures of the nerves, blood vessels, and muscles)
- They will then give you a local anesthetic to numb the nerves that go to the area where you will be having surgery.
- The block will last for 4 to 16 hours. The anesthesiologist may place a small tube along the nerve to help the block last longer, if needed.

Important: Tell a member of your health care team if anything bothers you while the nerve block is being done.

If you will need local anesthetic after your surgery for pain control:

- › Your health care team may place a catheter (thin, hollow tube) under your skin. The catheter will be hooked up to a small pump filled with local anesthetic.
- One (1) dose (amount) of local anesthetic lasts for up to 12 hours, or until the tube is removed.

Will I be asleep while the nerve block is done?

No. It is important that we can talk to you and ask how you feel during the block. This is so you can tell us if you have any symptoms that may be a sign that the needle is too close to or touching the nerve.

How long will it take to get the block?

- It usually takes 5 to 15 minutes to get a nerve block.
- Then it takes another 10 to 15 minutes for the block to start working fully. Weakness and numbness is a sign that the nerve block is working well.

How well does a nerve block work?

- Nerve blocks work very well (95% of the time).
- The anesthesiologist will test your nerve block to make sure it is working before your surgery starts. If it is not working well, you may be given other medications or a general anesthetic.

What are the possible side effects?

- Side effects and problems from nerve blocks are rare.
- The anesthesiologist will try not to put the needle too close to or into the nerve. **It is important to tell the anesthesiologist right away if you have:**
 - › A sudden, shooting pain
 - › A feeling like an electric shock (paresthesia)

How will a nerve block help me after my surgery?

- You will have less chance of nausea (feeling sick to your stomach).
- You should need less pain medication.
- Since you will need less pain medication, you will likely have fewer side effects.

- You may be able to progress more quickly with physical therapy and your exercise schedule.
- You will likely go home sooner.

Is it safe to have a nerve block?

- Nerve blocks are very safe. Rarely (less than 1 in 100), a person may have ongoing numbness or weakness in the blocked area for more than 24 hours (1 day) after the block is done. This usually goes away within 3 to 4 weeks.
- Rarely (less than 1 in 100), a person may have permanent numbness and weakness in the blocked area.

At home

Call 902-222-1938 if:

- › You still have numbness or weakness in the blocked area after 24 hours (or after 48 hours if you had a femoral [in your thigh] nerve block).

or

- › You have new numbness or weakness on the affected side.

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.

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