



Patient & Family Guide

2022

# How to Manage a Nerve Block Infusion at Home



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# 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. It is attached to a pump filled with pain medication. This pamphlet explains how a nerve block works.

**We want to provide you with safe, effective pain control from the comfort of your home.**

## What is a nerve block?

- A nerve block is a medication called a local anesthetic. It is given by an anesthetist (a doctor who gives you medication to put you to sleep 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 from reaching your brain. This is like the medication a dentist uses to numb your mouth.
- The nerve block will cause the surgery area to feel numb for about 2 ½ days after your surgery.

## How does a nerve block work?

- Before your surgery, an anesthesiologist will insert (put in) a catheter (small tube) close to 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 heating pads, hot water bottles, or ice packs) on your nerve block dressing.**
- Make sure the catheter is not stretched or kinked (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 the nerves, and the numbness will wear off.
- If the dressing gets loose, put a new one on top to keep the tube in place. We will give you a few dressings to take home with you.

## **What do I need to know about the numbing medication?**

- It is normal to not be able, or to barely be able, to move your fingers or toes while the pump is giving you medication.
- 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 pills according to the pharmacist's directions.
- You will be given a prescription for pain pills 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 these pain pills available to take as soon as you start to feel pain.**
- When you take a pain pill, it can take up to 1 hour before it starts helping the pain.

## **What do I need to do at home?**

- 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 the skin is red, puffy, or painful, call Acute Pain Services right away at 902-222-1938.
  - › If you had foot or ankle surgery, the catheter will enter your skin near the back or the side of your knee.
  - › If you had shoulder or arm surgery, the catheter will be taped near your neck or upper arm.
- 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 remove the dressing.**
- If you are having 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 crutches or a walker when walking, if needed.

## **How do I remove the catheter?**

The catheter should be removed when the pump is empty. Usually this is about 2 ½ days after the pump is connected. There are NO needles in your skin, only a small, flexible tube.

### **To remove 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 (tube). The catheter 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 remove 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 removing the catheter, place 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 pills.
- › the area around where the catheter enters your skin is red, puffy, or painful.
- › the catheter comes away from the pump or pulls out of your skin.
- › you are not able to remove the catheter.

**What are your questions?  
Please ask. We are here to help you.**



**A member of the Acute Pain Service will call you at home every day until you have removed your nerve block.**

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 pills?
- 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 \_\_\_\_\_ .



### **Looking for more health information?**

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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*Prepared by: Acute Pain Service*

*Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services*

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If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

PM85-1356 © December 2022 Nova Scotia Health Authority

The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.