Nerve Block for Chronic Pain

You will be having a:

_________________________________________
Nerve Block for Chronic Pain

What is a nerve block?
A nerve block is a procedure to inject medication or place a special needle close to a nerve or joint. Nerve blocks can help diagnose or treat certain types of pain. They can work very well when combined with exercise, medication, or other ways to manage pain.

The goal of a nerve block is to lower pain so you can do more of your usual activities and take care of yourself. The benefits of a nerve block may go away over time. Some patients will only have pain relief for a short time, while others may not have any pain relief.

Common types of nerve blocks:
• **Facet joint and sacral iliac joint injections**: a small needle is guided into the joint to inject local anesthetic (freezing) and corticosteroid medications (cortisol-like medications used to relieve inflammation).
• **Epidural**: a small needle is guided into the space around the spinal cord using dye and an X-ray. Then local anesthetic and corticosteroid medication are injected.
• **Radiofrequency denervation (RFG):** 1 to 3 needles are put in or near a facet joint (small joints between each pair of vertebrae in the spine) and radiofrequency ‘radio waves’ are directed through each needle to interrupt nerve conduction (signals your nerves are sending).

**How do I get ready for a nerve block?**

• Do not skip any meals before your nerve block. Eat small healthy portions and drink plenty of water. **If you are an insulin-dependent diabetic, do not change your eating patterns before your nerve block.**

• Take your medications as usual, including your pain medications. Bring a list of your medications with you.

• Tell your primary health care provider if you are on blood thinners, including aspirin, or if you are diabetic. **You may have to stop taking your blood thinner for a week (7 days) before your nerve block.** Your primary health care provider or specialist will decide if you can stop taking your blood thinner, so contact them at least 3 weeks before your nerve block. If you cannot stop taking your blood thinner, please call 902-473-4130 to reschedule your nerve block.
• Arrange to have someone drive you home. Your nerve block will be cancelled and rescheduled if you do not have someone to drive you on the day of your nerve block. If you are going home by taxi, you will need someone to go with you other than the taxi driver.

How is a nerve block done?
• You will be awake and asked to lie face down during the procedure. An IV needle will be put in your hand as a safety measure. The area where the nerve block will be placed will be cleaned. The doctor will numb this area with medications so that you do not feel pain. It is important to stay still during your procedure. An X-ray machine called a fluoroscopy will help guide the needle. The pain specialist may talk with you during the nerve block. Nerve blocks usually take less than 30 minutes. Afterwards you will be monitored for 15 to 30 minutes in the Post Recovery Care Unit before you can go home.

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What are the possible side effects and risks?
All nerve blocks have risks. This treatment is not guaranteed to help your pain.

Common side effects include:
› A few days with more pain
› Bruising
› Numbness
› Swelling near the injection site

Rarely, side effects may include:
› Allergic reaction
› Bleeding
› Infection
› Seizure
› Nerve or spinal cord damage or paralysis (loss of movement) — (these are rare)

If you get a corticosteroid injection and are diabetic, this may cause higher blood sugar levels.
Go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have:

› Signs of infection at the injection site (such as redness, swelling, or heat)
› Bleeding at the injection site
› Allergic reaction
› New severe (really bad) headache
› New trouble with bowel/bladder control or leg weakness

What will happen after the procedure?
You may be sore or have more pain before you feel better. A nerve block may take from a few days to 2 weeks to help with pain.

For normal discomfort after a nerve block, use ice (3 to 4 times for up to 20 minutes each time) for the first day (24 hours) and avoid strenuous (hard) activities. You may take medication to help with pain after the procedure if recommended by your pain specialist.

Activities
Take it easy and do less activity, including work, for 1 to 2 days (24 to 48 hours) after your nerve block, unless told otherwise by your pain specialist. You can go back to your normal activities in about 1 to 3 days.
For 24 hours after your nerve block, do not:
› Drive or operate machinery
› Drink alcohol
› Act as a main caregiver for another person
› Sign financial or legal documents

Medications and blood sugar levels
• Take your medications as usual after your procedure.
• If you have diabetes and have had a corticosteroid injection, monitor your blood sugar levels closely after your procedure.

Will I need another nerve block?
Some nerve blocks may be repeated. Your doctor will decide when it makes sense to repeat your nerve block(s) by checking:
› How much pain relief you get
› How long the nerve block lasts
› Any side effects you have

For more information:
Call the Chronic Pain Service to talk with your doctor or nurse.
Hours: Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Phone: 902-473-7672
Notes:

Looking for more health information?
Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
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

Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.
Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!
www.nshealth.ca

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