



Patient & Family Guide
2019

Managing Your Surgical Pain with Nerve Blocks

Aussi disponible en français :
*Anesthésie par bloc nerveux pour supprimer
la douleur pendant l'opération (FF85-2103)*



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What are nerve blocks?

A nerve block sends local anesthetic (numbing medicine) 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 should I have a nerve block?

- You should be completely comfortable during surgery. For some types of surgery, such as abdominal (stomach area) surgery, you need to have a general anesthetic (medicine that puts you to sleep during surgery).
- If you are having surgery on an arm or a leg, your nerves can be blocked so that you don't have any pain during surgery, and have less pain after surgery. Sometimes a nerve block is all you need to be comfortable, and you do not need general anesthesia.
- If you have many medical problems, or have had side effects from general anesthesia, having a nerve block may be a safer choice for you. With a nerve block there is less chance of an upset stomach or throwing up, as you will not need

as much pain medicine. We may also give you medicine to help you relax. This may make you sleepy enough to take a light nap during your surgery.

When will I be given 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 (OR).

How is a nerve block done?

- The anesthesiologist (doctor who gives nerve block medicine) will clean and numb the skin around the block area.
- You may be given medicine to help you relax.
- The anesthesiologist will use a special needle, a machine called a nerve stimulator, and an ultrasound machine (gives pictures of the nerves, blood vessels, and muscles) to find the right nerves. They will then give you local anesthetic to numb the nerves that go to the area where you will be having surgery.
- **It is important to tell staff if anything bothers you while the block is being done.**
- If you will need more numbing medicine after surgery for pain control, a catheter (small tube) may be put below your skin and hooked up to a small pump with pain medicine in it.

- One dose of numbing medicine (local anesthetic) will last for up to 12 hours, or until the tube is removed.

How well will the nerve block work?

- Nerve blocks work very well. They have a high success rate (95%). The anesthesiologist will test the block to make sure it is working before your surgery starts. If it is not working well, you may be given other drugs or a general anesthetic.

How will a nerve block help me after surgery?

- You will have less chance of feeling sick to your stomach.
- You should need less pain medicine.
- Since you will need less pain medicine, 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.

Are there any side effects from nerve blocks?

- Side effects and problems from nerve blocks are rare, but can sometimes happen.
- The doctor will try not to put the needle too close to or into the nerve. **If you have a sudden shooting pain or electric shock feeling (paresthesia), it is important to tell the doctor right away.**

How long will it take to get the block?

- It usually takes 5-15 minutes to get the block. It takes another 10-15 minutes for the block to start working fully. Weakness and numbness is a sign that the block is working well. The block will last for 4-16 hours. A small tube may be placed along the nerve to help your block to last longer, if needed.

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 means that you can tell us if you are having any symptoms that may be a sign that the needle is too close to or touching the nerve, such as shooting pain.

Should I avoid any activities after a nerve block?

- Use crutches or a brace when walking, if you have been told to use them.
- You can use an ice pack or a heating pad on the surgical site, if your surgeon says it is OK. Only use these for 15-20 minutes at a time and then take a 15-20 minute break. Check your skin for redness or whiteness – these may be signs that you need to use hot/cold therapy for shorter times or stop using it.
- Don't drive or operate machinery (e.g., lawn mower, snow blower, power tools) for 24 hours after having a nerve block, or as long as you feel numbness or weakness.

Can I say “No” to having a nerve block?

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

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

Is it safe to have a nerve block?

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

Call 902-222-1938 after you go home if you notice:

- You still have numbness or weakness in the blocked area after 24 hours (or 48 hours after femoral (in your thigh) block insertion) OR
- You have **new** numbness or weakness on your affected side.

