

## A Patient's Guide to Peripheral Nerve Blocks

Peripheral nerve blocks provide pain control to specific areas of the body. This may be an option if you are having surgery on the shoulder, wrist, arm, hand, breast, chest, abdomen, groin, hip, knee, ankle and foot.

- The main benefit for most patients is less pain.
- Nerve blocks will decrease your sense of pain for a longer period of time. You may find relief from pain for six to 30 hours after the single shot method. If you have a longer surgery you may have a catheter inserted with a pump to give the medicine. A nerve block can be used for up to three days.
- Nerve blocks decrease the need for narcotic pain medicine. This decreases the side effects you may have like nausea and changed mental status. If you have these side effects you may need to stay longer in the Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU).
- Nerve blocks may decrease the rate of serious problems like infections and blood clots.

If you are thinking about having a peripheral nerve block, you should expect:

- The anesthesiologist will talk about options with you. You will decide if a nerve block is right for you. The doctor will answer your questions.
- In most cases the nerve block will be done in a special area before your surgery. Sometimes a block will be placed after the surgery.
- You will have an intravenous (IV) line. You will be connected to monitors.
- You may get some medicine for pain or anxiety before you get the nerve block.
- You may also receive some oxygen.
- The area to be blocked will be cleaned and numbed.
- The anesthesiologist will then inject the medicine to give pain relief during and after your surgery.

Side effects may occur after a nerve block. These depend on the where the nerve block is given. These may include:

- The injection usually causes a little discomfort.
- You may be unable to move the arm or leg. This weakness will wear off as the nerve block wears off.
- If you have a nerve block in the neck you could have a drooping eyelid, dilated pupil, hoarseness, or shortness of breath.

Problems can occur with any type of anesthesia but are fairly uncommon.

- There are few patients that have problems with nerve blocks. However, infection, bleeding, nerve injury, blood vessel injury and reactions to the anesthetic drug can occur.
- If the nerve block does not work at first, more medicine can be given through the block. You can also take some pain medicine with the nerve block.

If you need a longer period of pain relief your anesthesiologist and surgeon may suggest inserting a catheter at the time of the nerve block.

- The catheter is a small plastic tube (smaller than a spaghetti noodle) that is attached to a pump with medicine.
- Medicine given through the catheter provides pain control for a longer time (up to three days).
- Continuous catheters have the same rate of problems as single injection nerve blocks.
- You will go home with the catheter and pump. You will be able to remove the catheter when the medicine is gone. The catheter and pump are thrown away.
- Sometimes a small amount of clear or blood tinged fluid may be seen under the clear dressing. This is normal and is no cause for concern.
- You will get a follow up phone call from the Kalamazoo Anesthesiology group after you are home.

Here is a phone number to call if you have questions about your peripheral nerve block.

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If you have more questions please ask your anesthesiologist.

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