

Nerve block information

This leaflet is for patients being offered a regional (nerve) block prior to their surgery. If you have any questions after reading this leaflet, please speak to your doctor, anaesthetist or nurse. On the last page you will also find some post-op advice that you may find useful to read before your operation.

You may be offered a regional nerve block for your arm or hand surgery. This is an injection of local anaesthetic that numbs the part of your body having surgery.

Your anaesthetist will see you on the day of your surgery and discuss whether a nerve block may suit you. Many people having nerve blocks stay awake during their surgery but you may also be offered sedation or a general anaesthetic.

What to expect

The nerve block takes place in a room next to the operating theatre. Your anaesthetist will insert a small cannula into your vein to monitor your pulse and blood pressure. You may be given some sedation through the cannula.

An area of skin near the site of your surgery will be cleaned and an ultrasound probe or nerve stimulator will be used to identify the nerves to your arm. If a nerve stimulator is used you may feel this as a twitching sensation in your hand or arm. This is normal and will show that the injection is in the right place.

Local anaesthetic is then injected around the nerves. You may feel this as a slight pressure sensation. The block takes 20-40 minutes to work and will leave your arm feeling numb and heavy. It is normal to feel a 'pins and needles' sensation as the block starts to work. Your anaesthetist will check the block is working properly before your surgery begins.

In theatre a member of staff will stay with you the whole time and your arm will be covered so you cannot see your surgery. You may wish to bring a music player with you or you will be offered some sedation. A tourniquet is placed around your upper arm to lessen blood flow and after a while you may start to feel this as a tight band. If this becomes painful you can be offered some additional pain relief.

Benefits of a nerve block

- A nerve block will give **good pain relief** for many hours after your surgery and reduce the need for strong pain killers that can make you drowsy.
- It can avoid the **risks associated with a general anaesthetic**, such as sickness, drowsiness and sore throat, and you are more likely to eat and drink and get up and about straight after your surgery.

- It may also be of benefit if your existing medical problems make you at greater risk from a general anaesthetic.

Risks of a regional/nerve block

All medical procedures carry risks. Those associated with nerve blocks can include:

- **Bruising** where the injection is done. Bleeding from larger blood vessels is uncommon but can be stopped at the time.
- **Infection** around the injection site. If this becomes red and swollen it may be treated with antibiotics.
- **Temporary nerve damage.** About 1 in 10 people experience some tingling or numbness in their arm or hand for a few weeks after the surgery. These symptoms have gone after 6 weeks in 95% of people and gone completely after 1 year in 99% of people.
- **Permanent nerve damage** can occur in approximately 1 in 2000 to 1 in 5000 people.
- Whether or not you have a nerve block, nerve damage can occur as a result of the surgery, the tourniquet or the position you lie in.
- **Inadequate block.** Most nerve blocks work very well but if you feel pain from the surgery you should tell your anaesthetist immediately. You may be given more local anaesthetic, painkillers or a general anaesthetic.
- More serious problems such as seizures or heart problems are extremely rare but your anaesthetic team will be able to deal with these should they occur.

Some risks are specific to the type of regional/ nerve block you are having:

- If you are having an injection around your collar bone there is a less than 1 in 1000 risk of damage to the lining of your lung.
- If you are having an injection around your neck you are quite likely to experience a droopy eyelid or hoarse voice. This is due to spread of the local anaesthetic to other nerves in the area and will return to normal as the block wears off.

Your anaesthetist will be able to talk to you more about the risks on the day of your surgery.

More information

- www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients-and-relatives

You may wish to watch the online video **Nerve Blocks: An Information Video For Patients** at <http://ra-uk.org/index.php/patient-info-video>

Visit the Trust website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Written: Dr Michael Holland, Dr Kelly Place, April 2018
Review due: April 2020

Are you BLOCK SAFE?

As part of your operation you have had a regional anaesthetic block (a numb arm/leg) to make you more comfortable. To look after your limb until the block wears off we ask that you check four things whilst on the ward or at home.

S

Slings and scalding

Ensure a safe limb, take care to wear your **sling**, avoid **scalding** your numb arm / leg. Protect your numb limb from any pressure areas with a pillow.

A

Analgesia / painkillers

Make sure that you take all your regular / prescribed **painkillers** even if you are comfortable now, in readiness for when the block / numbness wears off, so that you are not suddenly in pain or discomfort.

Please take the following (tick/delete as appropriate)

- Paracetamol** 1g (2x 500mg tablets) every 4-6 hours (maximum 4g, 8 tablets in 24 hours)
- Ibuprofen** 400mg (2x 200mg tablets) every 8 hours (maximum 1200mg, 6 tablets in 24 hours)
- Codeine Phosphate** 30-60mg (1-2 tablets) every 4-6 hours (maximum 240mg, 8 tablets in 24 hours)
- Tramadol** 50-100mg (1-2 tablets) every 4-6 hours (maximum 400mg, 8 tablets in 24 hours)
- Gabapentin 100mg/300mg (please circle)**, 1 tablet twice a day, one in the morning and one before bed

F

Falls

While your limb is blocked it may affect your **balance**. Be careful when getting up or walking that you do not fall.

E

Ensure block receding

If your arm/leg is not back to normal /or **still feels numb** 48hours after your operation contact: (0118) 322 7068 between 9am and 4pm or ring the switchboard on (0118) 322 5111 out of hours and ask for the anaesthetic registrar. We will arrange to see you.