

Peripheral Nerve Blocks

What is a peripheral nerve block? Numbing medicine (local anesthetic) is placed near a nerve to decrease pain after surgery. The nerve that is numbed depends on the type of surgery that you are having.

How is a peripheral nerve block placed?

After an intravenous (IV) line is started, a few monitors will be placed and you will be provided with oxygen and mild sedation for you comfort. The numbing medicine is placed below the skin with the aid of an ultrasound and/or nerve stimulator. Both of these technologies help to make sure that the numbing medicine will be close enough to the nerve to numb the correct area of the body.

What are the risks? All of the risks are very rare but include infection, bleeding, incomplete block, reaction to a medication and damage to nerves. With certain blocks, there is a risk of lung puncture as well.

How should I expect to feel? Numbness may last 8—24 hours depending on the type of nerve block and numbing medicine. You may experience weakness or be unable to move the numb extremity during this time. A “pins & needles” sensation may occur and is normal. This often occurs as the nerve block is wearing off.

How do I care for the numb area? Be careful if preparing hot foods or drinks and prevent spills to the numb area. Be careful if applying heat or cold to the affected extremity as decreased sensation could lead to injury. If a lower extremity is affected, always have assistance for getting up or walking. Keep pressure or restrictive clothing away from the affected extremity, use pillows for support and avoid falling asleep on the numb extremity. Use splints, or devices ordered by your surgeon and check pressure points for redness or irritation as you may not feel this due to decreased sensation.

Could I still have pain after the nerve block? Yes. A nerve block does not guarantee that you won't have any pain. Everyone's nerves do not follow the same pathways and sometimes surgeries are more involved than initially intended. Your surgeon will prescribe pain pills to take to help with additional pain.

How do I manage my pain? Fill your pain medicine prescriptions on your way home from the hospital whether or not you have pain at that time. Take the prescribed pain medicine before going to bed for the night or if you feel your pain increasing.

What are rare side effects? These include bleeding from the injection site and numbness lasting longer than 48 hours. **If you experience numbness around the lips or tongue, metallic taste in the mouth, visual disturbances or ringing in the ears, notify your doctor immediately or call the hospital operator (843) 792-2123 to reach the RAPS attending anesthesiologist or resident on call. Call 911 for any emergency situation.**

Continuous Nerve Block Catheters

What is a continuous nerve block catheter?

Numbing medicine (local anesthetic) may be given as a single injection or as a continuous infusion. A tiny tube (about the size of fishing line) is placed below the skin close to a nerve. This is later connected to an infusion pump set to deliver a specific dose of local anesthetic continuously.

How long will I have the continuous block? 2-3 days depending on the type of surgery.

How is the catheter removed? The tape is removed (the most uncomfortable part) and the catheter will come out (relatively painless).

What if I have pain after the catheter is removed? Your doctor will prescribe pain pills to take to help with additional pain.

Joint Replacement Goals

Goals. The mission of our service for patients having a total joint replacement is to (1) improve and expedite ambulation and (2) improve range of motion while decreasing pain. Unfortunately, a complete numb extremity many not allow you to actively participate in your therapy. Therefore, our goal is to improve your comfort without impeding your therapy.

Pain control after surgery

After surgery, nearly everyone has pain. This is called acute pain and it will naturally decrease as the body heals. Controlling pain is a team effort. At MUSC, the department of anesthesia and Perioperative medicine has a special team of doctors called the Regional Anesthesia and Perioperative Pain Service (RAPS). Your surgeon may request RAPS to use advanced techniques to effectively help with your postoperative pain.

Do I need a nerve block?

That is entirely up to you. The RAPS team will offer a nerve block at the request of a surgeon, anesthesiologist or patient. Each patient will be visited and evaluated on an individual basis .

This booklet has been prepared for you by the Regional Anesthesia Pain Service, a division of the Department of Anesthesia and Perioperative Medicine. The purpose is to inform you of possible methods of postoperative pain control prior to your surgery.

While regional anesthesia can sometimes be used as your primary anesthetic in the operating room, often is it utilized for postoperative pain in addition to general anesthesia for your operation. Your surgeon and anesthesiologist will work with you to develop a plan that is best for you.

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