

YOUR GUIDE TO

Understanding Nerve Blocks

POST-OP PAIN MANAGEMENT

Oregon Anesthesiology Group

Information for Patients

Nerve blocks

A nerve block helps reduce pain after surgery by targeting the specific area affected by your procedure. Your anesthesiologist can give a single injection nerve block or provide pain relief with a continuous nerve block. Your anesthesiologist and surgeon will recommend the best option for you, based on your procedure and medical history.

Single injection nerve blocks

A single injection nerve block offers pain relief for 6-24 hours after surgery. The numbing medication injected will surround the nerves responsible for sensation and movement of the particular area of surgery. By blocking pain signals from the nerves to the brain, this medication may make the affected surgical area feel numb and weak. As the nerve block gradually wears off, you will begin to experience some tingling and return of motion and sensation.

Recovering with a single injection nerve block

After receiving a nerve block, it's important to be careful with the numb area of your body. You will not be able to feel any sensation in the area including pain, heat, or cold. Protect yourself against injury with the following tips:

- Avoid excessive heat, cold, or pressure.
- Rest the numb limb on a pillow and move it slightly every hour or two.
- Take oral pain medication before the nerve block wears off, as directed by your doctor.

Manage pain with nerve blocks

Nerve blocks are an effective way to help reduce pain after surgery and allow your body to heal and recover. While pain pills affect the entire body, a nerve block targets only the area where you had surgery. This targeted treatment offers many benefits, including:

- You will typically need less opioid pain medication, which decreases side effects such as nausea, constipation, dizziness, confusion, and long-term drug dependence.
- You will typically return home more quickly after surgery and in less pain.

When to call your anesthesiologist

Contact your anesthesiologist immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Severe swelling or bruising at the nerve block site
- Bleeding, swelling, redness, tenderness, or discharge at catheter insertion site.
- Confusion, incoherent speech, ringing in the ears, or tingling around the lips.

Note: If this happens, turn your pain pump off and call immediately.



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Continuous nerve blocks

A continuous nerve block delivers numbing medicine to the affected area of your body through a catheter (flexible tube) and a pump. The pain pump sends medicine at regular times to block the nerves' ability to send pain signals to the brain as you recover from your procedure. You may experience numbness, tingling, or muscle weakness in the affected area.

Caring for a continuous nerve block

Recovering from surgery can be a long process. Your nerve block will help reduce pain and allow your body to heal. Be sure to take proper care of the nerve block catheter and pump, by following these guidelines:

- Avoid excessive heat, cold, and pressure.
- Avoid showers or tub baths. You may take a sponge bath.
- Avoid excessive movement, which could dislodge the catheter.
- Follow instructions for caring for the dressing around the catheter. You may secure loose dressing with provided tape, but avoid changing the dressing yourself.

A small amount of dark fluid around the catheter is normal. Clear fluid around the catheter and occasional air bubbles are also common.

Removing the catheter

Your surgeon and anesthesiologist will discuss when you can remove the catheter attached to the pain pump. Typically, the catheter can be removed once the pain pump is empty, which takes less than seven days. To avoid infection, be sure to remove the catheter within 12 hours of the pain pump becoming empty.

When it's time to remove your catheter:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and remove your dressing.
- Gently pull the catheter out.
- Using a clean gauze, apply pressure to the insertion site for five minutes.
- Cover with an adhesive bandage.

Complications and adverse reactions

Nerve blocks are a common way to reduce pain after surgery, and recent advances have made them even safer and more effective. As with any medicine, there are associated risks and complications. These are very rare, but may include:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Confusion
- Incoherent speech
- Ringing in the ears
- Tingling in the lips
- Allergic reaction
- Neuropraxia (temporary loss of motor and sensory function)
- Nerve damage (extremely rare)

Talk to your surgeon and anesthesiologist about any questions you may have. They can help guide you to the solution that is best for you.

