



Sympathetic Nerve Block

What to expect from your procedure

This handout explains **sympathetic nerve block**, a way to find out if:

- **The sympathetic nervous system plays a role in sending pain signals to your brain.**
- **If stopping the pain signals on a short-term basis can ease your pain and other symptoms.**

You will need to keep a diary of your pain symptoms for 1 week after your procedure.

What is sympathetic nerve block?

Sympathetic nerve block is done to find out if the *sympathetic* (non-voluntary) nervous system plays a role in sending pain signals to your brain. The procedure will also show if stopping these signals for a short time can ease your pain and symptoms such as unpleasant feelings, coldness, muscle cramps, and others.

This procedure is a minimally invasive treatment. First, an anesthetic medicine is injected around the nerve to numb it. After the injection, you may have redness or a warm feeling in this area. If the injection is done in your neck, your eyelid on the side of the injection may close for a while. You may also have a hoarse voice, and it may feel like there is a lump in your throat.

How is it done?

The doctor will use local anesthetic to numb the skin where the needle will be inserted. The doctor then uses X-ray or ultrasound to guide the needle to the correct area.

To make sure the needle is in the right place, the doctor will ask you questions at certain times during the procedure. When the doctor is sure the needle is in the right place, the medicine is injected. You may feel some discomfort or pressure during the injection.

You may receive a light sedation for this procedure, but you will stay awake so that you can talk with the doctor.

How long does it take?

The procedure takes about 15 minutes. But plan to spend 2 hours at the clinic from the time you are admitted until you leave.

Side Effects

There is a risk for side effects with any medical procedure. Talk with your doctor about side effects before having any treatment.

Possible side effects from sympathetic nerve block are:

- Pain at the injection site.
- Infection.
- Bleeding.
- Nerve injury.
- Allergic reaction.
- Headache.
- Inability to pass urine.
- Worse pain than before the procedure.

How to Prepare for Sympathetic Nerve Block

Medicine Changes

You must stop taking blood-thinning medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), enoxaparin (Lovenox), and others before having sympathetic nerve block. If you take any blood-thinning medicine, talk with your doctor who prescribed the medicine as soon as you have scheduled this procedure.

You may keep taking low-dose aspirin and anti-inflammatory medicines.

On the Day of the Procedure

Note: You may eat and drink as usual if you will **not** receive sedation.

For all patients:

- Arrive at the clinic at least 30 minutes before your appointment.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Bring someone with you who can drive you home.
- If you are on a long-acting or slow-release pain medicine, your pain doctor may tell you how to reduce your medicine before the procedure.
- Do **not** take any short-acting pain medicine such as oxycodone/acetaminophen (Percocet), acetaminophen (Tylenol), or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) the day of your procedure.

Note: If your blood pressure is high and not well-controlled, we may need to schedule your procedure for another time.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.:

Call the Center for Pain Relief at 206-598-4282.

After hours and on weekends and holidays:

Call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Pain Fellow on call to be paged.

If you will be receiving sedation:

- You **must** bring someone with you who can drive you home after the procedure.
- Starting 8 hours before your appointment:
 - Do **not** eat any solid food.
 - For the first 4 hours, you may drink only clear liquids.
 - Do **not** drink anything for 4 hours before your procedure.
 - If you need to take any medicines during this time, take them with only a small sip of water.

We will not be able to give you sedation if you do not follow these diet guidelines.

- **If you will be receiving sedation and you have diabetes**, you must also ask your diabetes care provider how to manage your medicines the morning of your procedure since you will be fasting.

When can I resume my usual activities?

- If you had sedation, do **not** drive or use machinery for 24 hours after your procedure.
- If you have pain relief after your procedure, do **not** start doing all the activities you have not been able to do because of your pain. Remember, you still have the underlying problem that caused your pain. If you overdo it, your pain may return quickly, even within a few days of feeling better.
- It is important to do an exercise program that slowly strengthens the muscles you have not been able to use because of your pain. It will take time to build up your strength.

Follow-up

Before you go home after your procedure, you will be given the *Patient Self-Reported 1-Week Pain Diary*. Follow the instructions in the diary, then call **206-598-2442** 1 week after the procedure to report your results.

You **must** call the clinic as instructed in the pain diary to report your results. **Your follow-up appointment will not be scheduled until you have made this call.**

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