

After Your Interscalene Nerve Block Catheter Is Placed

Self-care at home

This handout give instructions to follow at home after having an interscalene nerve block catheter placed at UW Medical Center.

What is an interscalene nerve block?

An *interscalene nerve block* helps control pain. It is often used for shoulder surgery, a broken *humerus* (bone in the upper arm), or other arm surgery.

In this procedure, a *local anesthetic* (numbing medicine) will be injected through a tube (*catheter*) into the space around the nerves that supply feeling to your shoulder. This blocks pain signals from reaching your brain.

Will I be pain-free?

You may have pain even with the nerve block. Take your prescription pain pills if you have pain. **Never take more pain pills than your surgeon prescribed.**

The catheter has a pump that will keep giving you pain medicine as needed. The local anesthetic will wear off as the pump starts to work.

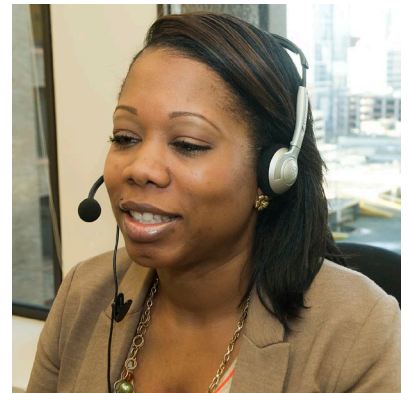
After the pump starts to work, it may be a short time before the pain medicine takes effect. If your pain gets stronger and it is time to take your pain pills, take them right away.

The pump will give you an ongoing basic dose of pain medicine. You can also push the button on the pump to deliver extra pain medicine if needed. To do this, squeeze the button all the way. The pump will then refill. It will be ready to be used again in 1 hour.

Are there any side effects?

You may have these short-term side effects:

- Droopy eyelid and small pupil on the side where the block is placed
- Hoarse voice



We will call you every day to ask how your nerve block is working.

- Lack of feeling in your chest (you will feel like you are not breathing as deeply as you actually are)

Do not be concerned about these side effects. They will go away when the nerve block wears off.

What else do I need to do?

- **Dressing care:** Keep the dressing clean and dry until it is time to remove the catheter. It is normal to have a small amount of blood or clear fluid under the dressing. If fluid leaks out from under the dressing, cover the dressing with gauze and tape it in place. When you lie down, you can also place a small towel under your neck to soak up any fluid or blood. Do **not** take the dressing apart.
- **When to call:** If you have any increased pain, swelling, or redness at the site of the catheter, call us at one of the phone numbers listed under “Who to Call” below.
- **Activities:** Follow the activity instructions your surgical team gave you. Be careful to protect your arm at all times. Since you do not have normal feeling in your arm and shoulder, you could easily injure it.
- **Pump care:** The catheter pump will work in any position. It is not affected by gravity. You may attach it anywhere that works best for you. The “balloon” inside the pump empties very slowly. You may not be able to see it grow smaller.
- **Catheter care:** You can remove your catheter when the balloon in the pump is empty. The timing of this depends on how often you need to push the button. Ask your provider when the pump will run out.

To remove the catheter:

- Remove the tape and adhesive and pull the catheter out. The catheter should come out very easily. You may feel some discomfort if the dressing pulls on your hair or skin.
- If you feel pain when you try to remove the catheter, **stop**. Call one of the numbers listed below.

Who to Call

We will call you every day to check on how your nerve block is working and to answer questions about the catheter. If you have any other concerns:

- **Weekdays from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.:** Call the UW Medicine Regional Block Service at 206.598.0540.
- **After hours and on weekends and holidays:** Call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the Acute Pain Service.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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