

## Lumbar Transforaminal Nerve Block Injection

*Benefits, risks, what to expect, and how to prepare*

*This handout explains a lumbar transforaminal nerve block injection. It includes benefits, risks, what to expect, and how to prepare.*

### What is a lumbar transforaminal nerve block injection?

In a *lumbar transforaminal nerve block injection*, medicine is injected near a *spinal cord nerve root*. This nerve root is where a spinal nerve branches off from the spinal cord between the *vertebrae* (small bones in the backbone).

This injection may be used to:

- **Diagnose pain:** Injecting a *local anesthetic* (numbing medicine) can tell your provider if a specific spinal nerve is causing your pain.
- **Treat pain:** Injecting a *corticosteroid* medicine (“steroid”) near the nerve root can help reduce pain as part of your pain control plan.

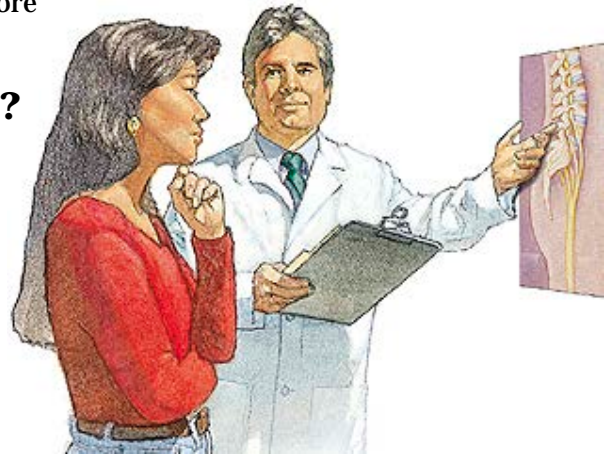
### What are the benefits?

- The local anesthetic may give you pain relief right away. The short-term pain relief can last for several hours.
- Steroids decrease inflammation over time, so they work more slowly than local anesthetics. If steroids are injected, it may take a few days or more than a week before you have pain relief.

### What are the risks?

Lumbar nerve block injections have been linked with:

- Infection
- *Spinal headaches* (head pain caused by leaking of the *cerebrospinal fluid* that surrounds the brain and spinal cord)



*Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any questions about your nerve block injection.*

- Nerve damage
- Bleeding or fluid leaks in the spinal cord
- Ongoing increase in pain

### **Contrast Reaction**

*Contrast* (X-ray dye) may also be injected as a part of this procedure. Contrast helps images show more clearly on X-rays.

If you have ever had an allergic reaction to contrast:

- You are at risk for having another reaction.
- Tell your provider about your contrast allergy **before** your procedure.

### **What can I expect?**

- You will lie on your stomach on an exam table.
- If you are having sedation, you will receive it at this time. The sedation will help you relax, but you will not be asleep. You need to be able to talk and answer questions during the procedure.

When you are ready, your doctor will:

- Use local anesthetic to numb your skin where the needle will be inserted.
- Use X-ray to guide the needle to the right place.
- Inject contrast into the area, if it is a part of your procedure.
- Give you the nerve block injection.

To make sure the nerve block injection is being done in the right place, your doctor will ask you questions from time to time during the procedure.

### **Does the injection hurt?**

- The local anesthetic will numb your skin so you will not feel the needle when it enters your skin.
- When the needle gets close to the spinal nerve, you may feel some discomfort, tingling, or a deep ache. Tell your doctor if this happens.

### **How long does the procedure take?**

Plan to spend 2 hours at the clinic, from the time you are admitted until you can leave. The nerve block injection itself takes only about 15 minutes.

### If You Are Having Sedation

- **Starting 6 hours before your injection:** Do not eat solid food. You may drink clear liquids.
- **Starting 2 hours before your procedure:** Do not take anything by mouth.  
*If you need to take any medicines during this time, take them with only a small sip of water.*
- **If you have diabetes:** Ask your primary care doctor how to manage your diabetic medicines the morning of your injection, since you will need to fast for 6 hours.
- **Do not drive for 24 hours after having sedation.** Even if you feel OK, the medicine affects your response time, which makes driving unsafe. You must have a driver to take you home.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your pain clinic if you have questions or concerns.

- Harborview Pain Clinic: 206.744.7065
- UWMC Center for Pain Relief: 206.598.4282

## How do I prepare?

- **You must stop taking all blood-thinning (anticoagulant) medicines at some time in the week before your nerve block.** If you are taking any of the medicines listed below, talk with your prescribing doctor as soon as you schedule your block to find out when to stop your blood-thinning medicine:
    - Coumadin (warfarin), Edoxaban (savaysa), Effient (prasugrel), Eliquis (apixaban) Plavix (clopidogrel), Lovenox (enoxaparin), Pletal (cilostazol), Pradaxa (dabigatran), Teclid (ticlopidine), Xarelto (rivaroxaban)
- Please call the pain clinic if you have not been able to talk to your doctor about stopping your blood-thinning medicine 1 week before the injection. We will need to reschedule your injection for a later date.
- If you take aspirin or anti-inflammatory medicines, talk to your doctor about changing your doses before your nerve block injection.

### Morning of the Injection

- You may eat and drink as usual, unless you are having sedation or your doctor has given you other instructions. (See box at left for how to prepare if you are having sedation.)
- Plan to arrive at least 45 minutes before your appointment.
- Be prepared to spend at least 2 hours at the clinic.
- Arrange for a responsible adult to take you home.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.

### After Your Injection

- Do not drive or use machinery for 24 hours after your injection.
- We may send you home with instructions to keep a pain diary. Please follow the instructions closely.
- Be sure you have follow-up visits set up as needed with your pain provider, primary care provider, or both.