

Peripheral Nerve Block

What to expect and self-care

This handout explains peripheral nerve block, which is done to control pain after surgery.

What is a peripheral nerve block?

A peripheral nerve block is a way to treat pain. It uses *local anesthetic* (numbing medicine) to block feelings of pain from a specific area of the body. Nerve blocks are often used after surgery on the arms and hands, legs and feet, or face.

How is it done?

After surgery, a local anesthetic is injected near a nerve to numb the area of your body you had surgery on.

A nerve block may be given as a single injection, or as a *continuous infusion*. In a continuous infusion, a tiny tube (about the size of a fishing line) is inserted near the nerve and then connected to a pump. The pump delivers anesthetic to the area and reduces pain for a longer time.

What can I expect?

When a nerve block injection is first given:

- Part of your body will feel numb.
- You will not be able to feel hot or cold in that area.
- It will be hard to lift or move your arm or leg.
- You may feel “pins and needles” in the area.

This means that the nerve block is working.

How long will the injection last?

Most nerve block injections numb the area for 6 to 18 hours. Some may last up to 24 hours.



Talk with your nurse if you have any questions about pain control after your surgery.

As your first dose of medicine wears off, you will feel start to feel some discomfort. We will give you a continuous infusion of local anesthetic to help control your pain.

Will I still have pain?

A continuous infusion helps reduce pain, but it will not fully numb the area. Plan to use both medicine and non-medicine methods to help control your pain as you recover from your surgery. Non-medicine methods include:

- Relaxation breathing or other forms of meditation
- Listening to soothing music
- Distracting yourself by thinking about other things, watching TV, or reading a book

Realistic goals for pain control are to prevent severe pain and keep pain at a lower level. Most people have mild to moderate pain with activity while they are recovering from surgery.

When should I ask my nurse for pain medicine?

Tell your nurse as soon as the numbness goes away and you start to feel a tingling or “pins and needles.” This means the first dose of medicine is wearing off.

Do **not** wait until you regain all feeling to ask your nurse for a dose of pain medicine. Waiting may make it harder to control your pain.

What if I’m asleep when the first dose of pain medicine wears off?

If you are ready to go to sleep and the first dose of pain medicine is still working, talk with your nurse about setting a time to wake up so that you can check if the pain medicine has worn off.

When should I call the nurse?

- **For your safety**, call your nurse if you want to:
 - Turn in bed
 - Get out of bed for any reason
- **To manage your pain medicine**, call your nurse:
 - When the numbness from the first dose of pain medicine begins to wear off and you feel tingling or “pins and needles” in the area
 - If your pain is not under control
 - If the numb feeling is bothering you too much

• **To manage other health issues**, call your nurse if you have:

- A metal taste in your mouth
- Numbness in your tongue or lips
- Dizziness
- Ringing in your ears
- Blurred vision
- Shaking you cannot control

Questions?

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

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.,
call your clinic:

After hours and on weekends
and holidays, call the
Community Care Line nurses:
206.744.2500