

# Peripheral Nerve Block

## Patient Information

**IMPORTANT:****If you are to be discharged the same day as your surgery:**

If you have received sedation or a general anesthetic, a responsible person must accompany you home after surgery even if you are travelling by taxi. We strongly advise that you have someone stay with you at home for the first 24 hours.

## **What is a peripheral nerve block?**

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A Peripheral Nerve Block (PNB) is the injection of local anesthetic near a nerve or near a bundle of nerves. A bundle of nerves is called a plexus. A peripheral nerve block may be used alone or with a general anesthetic to provide pain control for your surgery.

Local anesthetic is medicine that is used to freeze or numb the nerves around your surgical area. The local anesthetic stops the nerves from sending the pain signal to your brain.

Local anesthetic may be given through a one time injection or through a small plastic catheter that is placed into your surgical site to deliver the local anesthetic as an infusion. An infusion will provide a longer duration of numbness.

# How often is the local anesthetic given?

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- A local anesthetic may be given as a **one time injection**. You should feel pain relief for 10 to 16 hours depending on the type of local anesthetic used. If your surgery is on an arm or leg, your limb will feel numb and you may have decreased movement. Your anesthesiologist will tell you when you should expect to return to normal feeling.
- A local anesthetic may be given by a **continuous infusion**. A small plastic catheter will be inserted into your surgical site and will remain in place for 1 to 5 days. The catheter is attached to an electronic pump that delivers the medication at a constant rate.
- Your anesthesiologist may choose to add a **patient controlled option** to your continuous peripheral nerve block infusion. You will be given a control button that is attached to the electronic pump to use when you feel your pain increase. When you press the control button, the electronic pump will deliver a prescribed dose of local anesthetic to your surgical or painful area.

# How will my limb feel?

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The limb that is frozen can feel heavy and you may not be able to move it. This is normal. The local anesthetic also affects the nerves that control movement. As the local anesthetic wears off, you will be able to move your limb.

Do not do any activities that require coordination or strength, such as drive a car, operate machinery, cycle, etc. until normal sensation and movement of your limb have returned.

# Types of peripheral nerve blocks

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□ **Brachial Plexus or Interscalene Nerve Block**

This nerve block is used for pain or surgery in your shoulder, upper arm, lower arm, elbow wrist or hand. The local anesthetic will be injected on one side of your neck or arm pit.

During the time the block is working, keep your arm in a sling for support and protection. You will not be fully aware of the position of your arm – so it can be injured without you knowing.

□ **Femoral Nerve Block**

This nerve block is used for pain or surgery of the knee or leg. The local anesthetic will be injected around the femoral nerve found in your groin.

□ **Sciatic Nerve Block**

This nerve block is used for pain or surgery of the lower leg. The local anesthetic will be injected near your buttock area or back of thigh.

□ **Lumbar Plexus Nerve Block**

This nerve block is used for pain or surgery of your hip. The local anesthetic will be injected into an area near your buttocks.

□ **Paravertebral Nerve Block**

This nerve block is used for pain or surgery in your chest, lung, lower back or abdomen. The local anesthetic will be injected around the nerves coming out of your spine.

## If you have had a femoral, sciatic, lumbar plexus block:

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- You may experience leg weakness. This is expected.
- Do not place weight on the numb limb until the peripheral nerve block has worn off. The weakness may cause you to fall.
- If you have leg weakness, it is important to have someone help you at home.

## Care After your Peripheral Nerve Block

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- **Be careful** around heat sources such as stoves, ovens, radiators. You will not feel heat while your limb is numb and you could burn yourself.
- **DO NOT** place heat or use a heating pad over the area affected by your peripheral nerve block as you may not feel if the heat is too hot and this may cause a burn.
- If instructed to use ice, **DO NOT** leave ice on for more than 15 minutes as it could damage the skin and the underlying tissues.
- **DO NOT** apply ice to the tips of your fingers, toes, or penis.

# What happens when the peripheral nerve block wears off?

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- When the nerve block begins to wear off you may experience a ‘pins and needles’ sensation to the affected area.
- As soon as you begin to feel pins/needles or discomfort you may want to take your pain medication as ordered. It is much easier to treat or prevent your pain before it becomes severe.
- **If the peripheral nerve block has not worn off and you are going to bed:**
  - If you have not taken your pain medicine yet, you may want to take your pain medication before you go to sleep to prevent waking up in pain.

# When should I take my regular medications?

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- It is important to restart your usual prescribed medications immediately unless instructed by your doctor.
- If you take blood thinners (anticoagulants) such as Coumadin or plavix, please check with your surgeon/ anesthesiologist before taking.
- Talk with your doctor before taking herbal or alternative medications. Do not take for 1 week after your surgery.

## Notify the Doctor or go to the Emergency Department:

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- If you have a **return of numbness or inability to move** after the feeling and movement had returned to normal.
- If you have **increasing numbness or decreasing movement** of the affected area.
- If feeling and movement do not return to normal by 48 hours after surgery.
- If the prescribed medication for pain does not relieve your pain.
- Any redness, swelling or discharge at the peripheral nerve block insertion site.

## If you have any concerns about your peripheral nerve block call:

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- If your surgery was performed at the **Vancouver General Hospital (VGH)** call 604-875-4111 and ask to speak to the Anesthesiologist on duty for the Perioperative Pain Service. This is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week service.
- If your surgery was performed at **UBC Hospital**, call the UBC Anesthesia Department during the day at 604-875-4304. After 5:00 pm, call the VGH number.
- If your surgery was performed at **St Paul's Hospital or Mount St Joseph Hospital** contact the surgeon who performed the surgery or your family physician.

# Acknowledgements

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