

Peripheral Nerve Block Discharge Instructions



Overview

What to expect after a nerve block.

Nerve blocks affect many types of nerves, including nerves that control movement, pain, and normal sensation. Nerve blocks cause feelings such as numbness, tingling, heaviness, weakness or inability to move your operative extremity.

A nerve block can last for 2 to 36 hours depending on the medication used. Usually the muscle weakness wears off first, then the tingling, and finally you may start to notice pain. Keep in mind that this may occur in any order. Once a nerve block starts to wear off it is usually completely gone in 60 minutes. **If you continue to feel the effects of the nerve block longer than 48 hours, contact your surgeon.**

An interscalene nerve block, often done for shoulder surgery, may commonly cause other side effects such as:

- *Mild* shortness of breath
- A hoarse voice
- Blurry vision
- Unequal pupils
- Drooping of your eyelid on your operative side

Again, these symptoms are common with shoulder blocks and you should not be alarmed if they occur. **However, if you have severe shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, please go to the nearest emergency room.**

Protection of a Numb Extremity

After a nerve block, you cannot feel pain, pressure, or extremes in temperature in the operative extremity, so it is at increased risk for injury. For example, it is possible to burn your numb arm or leg on a hot stove without knowing it. Here are some helpful tips to protect your arm or leg:

- While you are awake, change the position of your arm or leg often. This helps to avoid putting too much pressure on the limb for long periods of time.
- While sleeping, pad the limb with pillows to avoid rolling onto it while you sleep. If you have had a shoulder block, it is a good idea to sleep in a recliner with pillows under your arm.
- If you have a cast or tight dressing, check the color of your fingers/toes every couple of hours. Call your surgeon if they look discolored.
- If you have had a shoulder block, you will go home with a sling. Wear it at all times until the nerve block wears off or until instructed otherwise by your surgeon.
- If you have had a leg block, do not bear weight on that leg until the block has worn off, otherwise you will fall.
- Use caution in cold weather. Cover your limb appropriately before going outside.

Taking Your Pain Medication

Start taking your prescription medication **AS SOON AS** the nerve block begins to wear off. Keep in mind that nerve blocks often wear off in the middle of the night. If you are going to bed and have not taken any pain medication, set an alarm to go off in 2-3 hours so you can assess the block. You may need to take pain medication in the middle of the night.