

Acute Pain Service

Local Anaesthetic Nerve Block for Pain Relief Following Limb Surgery

Introduction

Traditional methods of relieving pain with morphine after an operation do not always work well. They can also cause unwanted side effects such as sleepiness, itchiness, nausea and vomiting.

Over the years, anaesthetists have developed other ways of preventing pain using local anaesthetic drugs which work by numbing specific nerve fibres (local anaesthetic block), much as dentists do. As well as helping with the pain, this method makes it easier for you to do your physiotherapy and allows for a quicker recovery from your operation.

What will the anaesthetist do?

- Before your operation the anaesthetist will explain the exact procedure to you.
- In the anaesthetic room your anaesthetist will ask you to keep very still while they locate the nerves in your arm or leg and inject the local anaesthetic.
- This can be done either by a single injection or by placing a fine plastic tube (catheter) and infusing the medicine slowly, but continuously, down it using a special pump.

What will I feel?

To make the whole procedure more pleasant you may be given some drugs through a needle in your arm to make you sleepy:

- As the local anaesthetic is injected, you may notice a warm tingling feeling as it begins to take effect.
- Shortly after you will also start to feel your limb becoming weak (heavy) and numb.
- Your operation will only go ahead when you and your anaesthetist are sure that the area is numb.

What other pain relief will I be offered?

As well as the local anaesthetic nerve block, you may also be given other oral or intravenous pain killers. These may range from Paracetamol, 'anti-inflammatories' to morphine like drugs. The choice and type of drug will be explained to you.

How long will the local anaesthetic last?

The local anaesthetic which has been injected will keep your arm or leg numb for 8 to 14 hours if given as a single injection or else for the length of time that the infusion is running.

What if it does not work?

Your anaesthetist will make a plan for alternative pain relief should the local anaesthetic block fail. The ward staff will monitor you carefully following your operation and the Acute Pain Team will also review you to make sure your pain relief is adequate.

What about side-effects?

Please tell your anaesthetist or nurse if you begin to experience any of the following things:

- Tingling around your mouth and / or a metallic taste
- Ringing in your ears
- Feeling drunk
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Muscle twitches
- Difficulty in breathing

What happens after the local anaesthetic has worn off or the infusion stopped?

Alternative oral pain killers will be prescribed and offered to you, you will also be allowed extra doses of these if you need them.

What can I do to help?

Be careful with your limb as it will be numb and you may cause damage if you knock it. Relaxation can help reduce anxiety and ease any tension in your muscles. If you have any worries, please let the doctors and nurses know, as they may be able to help.



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Bengali

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