

- If local anaesthetic is injected into your nerves or blood vessels, there is a risk of fits or abnormal heart rhythms.
- A hoarse voice or droopy eyelids are temporary.
- Change in breathing if the nerve to the diaphragm is affected. You will be monitored with oxygen administration. Your breathing will improve as the block wears off.
- Collection of air around the lungs. If this affects your breathing, it can be treated.
- Nerve damage is very rare. It usually occurs as a numb patch which is likely to settle after a few days. Permanent nerve damage is very rare, 1 in 5000 or 1 in 10,000 blocks.

Care of the arm after surgery

After the nerve block, your arm will be supported on a soft sling. You should protect your arm on a pillow while asleep and avoid pressure on the arm.

After a nerve block you may not feel pain or extremes of temperature. Avoid hot and sharp objects (e.g. radiator, kettle, cooker) until the sensations have returned to normal. If you still have numbness or weakness after 48 hours and you have left the hospital, please contact your GP. They will be able to get in touch with the relevant surgical team.

For further information, please visit the website by the Royal College of Anaesthetists - <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo>

References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.



If you require this information in another language, large print, audio (CD or tape) or braille please email the Patient Information team at patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk

Peripheral nerve block of the upper limb

Anaesthetics Department

For urgent advice, information or feedback
please telephone switchboard 01205 364801
and dial extension 445293 (9.00am to 4.00pm)
or extension 445635 (24 hours)

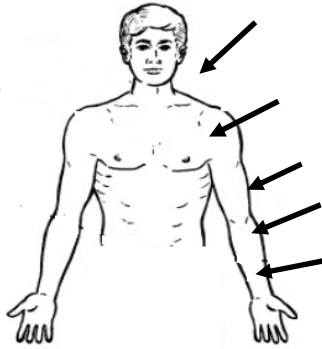
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What is a peripheral nerve block?

A peripheral nerve block involves injecting local anaesthetic and other pain killers near the major nerves of your arm.

Depending on the operation, the injection may be given near the side of your neck, near your collar bone, armpit, elbow forearm or wrist. This numbs the part of your body that needs surgery, so you will not feel any pain during the procedure.

Possible injection sites



What does the procedure involve?

The nerve block will be done either lying on your back or sitting propped up on your bed. You may have to turn your head to one side or lift your arm above your head. You may be given a mild sedative to make you feel more relaxed. The anaesthetist will then use an ultrasound or nerve stimulator to guide them as to where to inject the local anaesthetic. The nerve stimulator may make the arm twitch but it is not painful.

The anaesthetist will inject local anaesthetic to numb the area before passing the needle for the nerve block.

If you feel any pins and needles in your arm during the procedure, tell your anaesthetist immediately. This indicates that one of your nerves is being irritated and the needle may need to be repositioned. At first your hand will feel warm and tingly but within 10 to 25 minutes your hand will go numb and heavy and you may not be able to move it.

Will I see or feel anything during the procedure?

It is common to feel some tugging and pressure sensation during the procedure but you will not feel any sharp pain. Your anaesthetist will be present with you at all times. A screen will be put up so you will not be able to see your surgery.

How long will the block last?

The numbness will usually last a few hours but can last up to 24 hours.

Sometimes the anaesthetist will use a tiny plastic tube or catheter next to the nerves and connect to a special pump. The pump delivers local anaesthetic to the nerves and can provide pain relief for a few days.

Please take the pain killers you have been prescribed, so you have good pain relief once the block wears off.

What are the benefits of the nerve block?

- Pain relief during and after the operation. The nerve block also reduces the need for strong pain killer medications such as morphine (that can cause side effects to make you feel itchy, drowsy, sick or constipated).
- To avoid general anaesthetic. Your operation can be done using brachial plexus block alone. This avoids problems caused by general anaesthetic like sore throat and nausea resulting in a faster recovery.

However, if you prefer not to have a nerve block, your operation will be done under general anaesthetic alone.

What complications can happen?

- Failure of the block. Most blocks work well. If not, the anaesthetist will recommend a general anaesthesia or supplement your block with extra local anaesthetic.
- Bleeding and bruising at the injection site.
- Allergic reactions.