



Nerve block

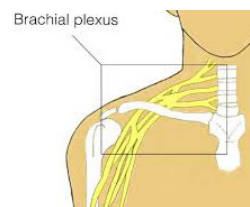
Shoulder, arm and hand surgery



Nerve block, also known as regional anaesthesia, is where a nerve or group of nerves in a specific area of the body can be made numb by a local anaesthetic injection. A brachial plexus block is used for upper limb surgery.

What is the brachial plexus?

The brachial plexus is the bundle of nerves that supply your shoulder, arm and hand with feeling and movement.



How is the nerve block performed?

Local anaesthetic is injected either into your neck, near the collarbone, or into your armpit using an ultrasound machine for guidance. Most people find that the injection feels similar to having a blood test. You might feel some pressure at the site of injection, or an electrical sensation in your hand or arm, while the injection is being given.

Local anaesthesia will give you long-lasting pain relief, during and after surgery. It can last from 2-18 hours, depending on the injection site and the types of medicines used.

Do I have to be awake?

Most people choose to be awake during the operation. If you are feeling anxious a sedative, to make you feel relaxed, can also be given.

What are the benefits?

- It reduces the need for other anaesthetic medicines. You may not need a general anaesthetic.
- Pain relief after your surgery that helps you move about earlier.
- Strong pain relieving medication may not be needed. This will help reduce side effects such as nausea (feeling sick), drowsiness and constipation.
- A shorter amount of time in hospital.

What are the risks ?

Serious problems such as temporary nerve damage, failure of the block, injury to nearby structures (blood vessels or the lung), local anaesthetic toxicity and seizures are very uncommon. Your doctor will be able explain the risks associated with your surgery in more detail, if required.

Before your surgery

- If you take blood thinning medicines or complementary, herbal and/or alternative medicines, ask your surgeon or anaesthetist if you should stop taking these before your surgery.
- Do NOT stop blood thinning medicines without medical advice. If you are asked to stop taking your blood thinning medication, ask your doctor when you can restart taking it.
- Stop drinking alcohol, smoking and taking recreational drugs as early as possible before your surgery.
- Do NOT drink any alcohol, smoke or take recreational drugs for 24 hours before your surgery.



The day of your surgery

- Your stomach must be empty before surgery. The hospital staff will tell you when to have your last meal and drink. Please follow these instructions to avoid a delay or cancellation of your surgery.
- Bring all your prescribed and over the counter medications such as herbal remedies and supplements to show your anaesthetist.
- If you feel unwell, telephone the ward or hospital for advice.

During the operation

- Your anaesthetist will ask you to keep still while the injection is given. You may notice a warm tingling feeling as the anaesthetic begins to take effect. The numbing effect of the local anaesthetic may take 15-40 minutes to work.
- Your operation will only go ahead when you and your anaesthetist are sure that the area is numb.
- You will remain alert and aware of your surroundings, unless you are having sedation.
- You can listen to your own portable music device using headphones or the music playing in the operating theatre.
- A screen shields the operating site, so you will not see the operation being performed unless you want to.

- If you are having sedation, you will be sleepy and relaxed, although you may be still aware of things going on around you.
- Your anaesthetist is always near you and you can speak to them whenever you want to.

How long will my arm be numb?

Your arm will be numb for 4-24 hours (longer if you have special tubing inserted). We will give you a sling to go home with until you are able to move your arm again.

What should I do while my arm is numb?

Do:

- Use your sling (even while you are sleeping) until your arm has regained its normal feeling and movement.
- Keep your arm well protected.
- Start taking your painkillers regularly, as prescribed, to make sure you don't have a lot of pain once the nerve block wears off.

Don't:

- Use any heavy machinery or drive.
- Rest your arm near a fire or radiator as you will not notice it burn.
- Place your arm anywhere that it may be injured.

Resources

Brachial plexus block video: www.ra-uk.org/index.php/patient-info-video

Regional Anaesthesia and Acute Pain Service: <https://www.nbmlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/nepean-hospital/department-of-anaesthesia-and-pain-management/regional-anaesthesia-and-acute-pain-service>

Contact information

For any questions or concerns:

Consultant Anaesthetist

Telephone: 4734 2356 or 0411 126 345

Monday to Friday 9am-5pm

After hours: 4734 2000 and ask them to page the Anaesthetic Registrar on 17071

If your arm is still numb or if you have any unusual feelings in it 48 hours after your surgery.

Telephone: 4734 2356 or 0411 126 345

Monday to Friday 9am-5pm

If you develop unexplained shortness of breath, or pain that is not well controlled by the painkillers you have been given, go to your nearest **Emergency Department**.



Health
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YouTube: Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District