



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Your Continuous Upper Extremity Nerve Block Catheter

This information explains your continuous upper extremity nerve block catheter, including what it is, how it works, and what to expect once it's placed.

About Your Nerve Block Catheter

A nerve block is when a local anesthetic is used to block a group of nerves from feeling pain. A local anesthetic is medication that's used to make an area of your body numb.

With a **continuous nerve block**, the local anesthetic is given through a catheter (a thin, flexible tube) that's connected to a medication pump. A continuous nerve block can stay in place for a few days to help you feel less pain after your surgery. Your anesthesiologist (doctor who specializes in medication to help with pain before, during, and after your surgery) will program your pump to give you a specific amount of local anesthetic. This amount may need to be changed depending on how much pain you have after your surgery.

With a **continuous upper extremity nerve block**, local anesthetic flows through a nerve block catheter to block the nerves in your upper extremity (shoulder, arm, or hand) from feeling pain. The nerve block catheter is placed near your neck to reach these nerves.

Your continuous upper extremity nerve block will take away most of your pain, but it may not take away all of it. You may also need to take pain medication while you have the nerve block.

What to Expect After Your Surgery

Your nerve block catheter will be placed during your surgery. It's normal for your shoulder, arm, or hand to feel numb right after your surgery.

You may have numbness in your face or neck on the side where you had surgery. You may also have a hoarse voice, drooping eyelid, small pupil, or stuffy nose. All of these things are normal. They're caused by the local anesthetic and will go away once your nerve block catheter is removed.

About 8 to 16 hours after your surgery, the stronger local anesthetic your doctor gave you during your surgery will start to wear off. You will be able to move your shoulder, arm, or hand more easily. You may have some discomfort as you regain feeling. Your nurse will program your medication pump to start giving you local anesthesia through your nerve block catheter. They may also give you pain medication to help with any discomfort.

Ask your nurse for pain medication before going to bed the first night after your surgery. This will help you keep from waking up in pain after the numbness wears off.

What to Expect While You Have a Nerve Block Catheter

- You may have some fluid leaking from around your nerve block catheter. This is the local anesthetic. This is normal and doesn't mean it isn't working. If your nerve block catheter is leaking, tell your nurse.
- Your nerve block catheter may fall out or be pulled out by accident. If this happens, tell your nurse. Don't throw your catheter away.
- Remember to be aware of where your shoulder, arm, or hand is at all times. You won't be able to fully feel it because of the local anesthetic. Make sure you protect it from getting hurt.
 - If your nurse gave you a sling, keep your arm in the sling at all times except while doing physical therapy.
- Tell your nurse if your shoulder, arm, or hand feels completely numb. Your pump may need to be turned off for a little while. It can be turned back on

when you can feel your arm again.

Tell Your Doctor or Nurse if You Have:

- Trouble breathing
- A rash or hives anywhere on your body
- Numbness around your mouth
- A metallic taste in your mouth
- Ringing in your ears
- Lightheadedness
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Chest pain
- Twitching anywhere on your body
- Seizures (uncontrolled shaking or stiffening of your body)

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns, call the Anesthesia Pain Service at 212-639-6851. You can reach us Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

After 4:00 PM, during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-2000 and ask for the anesthesia pain doctor on call.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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