

# Sympathetic Nerve Block: Your Experience



A sympathetic nerve block helps your doctor find the cause of the burning, pain, or tingling in your arms and hands, or legs and feet. During the test, medicine is injected near your spine. This blocks the sympathetic nerves in that region. If these nerves are causing your problem, the injection will ease your symptoms for hours, days, or longer. This injection is used both to help diagnose, and to treat, certain nerve problems including chronic pain.

The injection is done in a hospital or surgery center. You'll be asked to fill out some forms, including a consent form. You may also be examined.

Before you agree to this procedure, ask the healthcare provider the following question:

- Why do I need this procedure?
- Are there any alternatives?
- How many times have you done this procedure?
- What are the complications?
- When will I see the results?
- Will the medicine in this injection interact with other medicines I am taking?

If you don't feel comfortable asking these questions, ask a family member or friend to come with you to ask them. The answers are critical to your health and safety.

## Getting ready for your block

- At least a week before the block, tell your doctor what medicines you take. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicine, such as aspirin. It also includes vitamins, herbs, and other supplements. Ask if you should stop taking any of them before treatment.
- Tell your doctor if you're pregnant or think you could be pregnant.
- Tell your doctor if you're allergic to any medicines.
- Follow any directions you're given for not eating or drinking before the test.
- If asked, bring X-rays, MRIs, or other tests with you on the day of the block.

## During the procedure

To help you relax, your healthcare provider may give you medicine through an IV line. You'll lie on an exam table on your stomach, back, or side. This depends on where you'll be injected. During your block:

- The skin over the injection site is cleaned. A medicine (local anesthetic) is used to numb the skin.
- X-ray imaging (fluoroscopy) may be used to help your doctor see where the medicine goes. A contrast "dye" may be added to the medicine to help get a better image.
- A healthcare provider injects a local anesthetic near the ganglion (cluster of nerves) to numb your nerves. If the sympathetic nerves are causing your problem, the temperature in your hands or feet will rise quickly. The block will ease your symptoms for a while. Sympathetic nerve blocks may give long-term relief from symptoms. For this treatment, a few blocks are generally given 1 to 2 weeks apart.

## After the procedure

You'll stay in recovery for about 1 hour. Once you can walk, you can go home. Have an adult friend or relative drive you. A neck injection may cause the eyelid on that side of your face to droop a little. Your voice may also be hoarse. These things will go away in a few hours when the anesthetic wears off. Within 1 or 2 days, your hand or foot symptoms will most likely return. The injection site may also be swollen and sore for a few days. Your doctor can tell you when it's OK to return to work.

## When to call your healthcare provider

- Trouble swallowing
- Prolonged hoarseness
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher , or as directed by your provider
- Any other concerns

## Call 911

Call **911** right away if you have:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain

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