A Nerve Block for Chronic Pain

You will be having a:
A Nerve Block for Chronic Pain

About nerve blocks
A nerve block is a procedure to inject medication or place a special needle close to a nerve or joint. Nerve blocks can help diagnose or treat certain types of pain and can work very well when combined with exercise, medication, or other ways to manage pain.

The goal of a nerve block is to lessen pain so that you can do more of your usual activities and take good care of yourself. However, the benefits of a nerve block may be temporary and some patients will only gain pain relief for a short time while others may not have any pain relief.

In this guide you’ll learn about:
› How to get ready for a nerve block
› How a nerve block is done
› Side effects and risks
› What to expect and what to do afterwards
› Emergency situations
Common types of nerve blocks:

• Facet joint and sacral iliac joint injections: a small needle is guided into the joint to inject local anesthetic and corticosteroid medications.

• Epidural: a dye is injected to help guide the needle into the epidural space before or at the same time as a local anesthetic and corticosteroid medication.

• Radiofrequency denervation (RFG): 1-3 needles are put in or near a facet joint and radiofrequency ‘radio waves’ are directed through each needle to interrupt nerve conduction (signals your nerves are sending).

This pamphlet is just a guide. Please talk to your healthcare provider about your questions. We are here to help you.
How to get ready for a nerve block

Do not skip any meals before your nerve block. Eat lightly and drink plenty of water. If you are an insulin-dependent diabetic, do not change your eating patterns before your nerve block.

Take your medications as usual, including your pain medications. Please bring a list of your medications with you.

Tell your doctor if you are on blood thinners, including aspirin, or if you are diabetic. You may have to stop taking your blood thinner for a week before your nerve block. Your family doctor or specialist will decide if you can stop taking your blood thinner, so contact them at least 3 weeks before your nerve block. If you cannot stop taking your blood thinner, please call 902-473-4130 to reschedule your nerve block.

Arrange to have someone drive you home. Your nerve block will be cancelled and rescheduled if you do not have someone to drive you on the day of your nerve block. If you are going home by taxi, you will need someone to go with you other than the taxi driver.
How a nerve block is done
An intravenous needle (IV) will be put in your hand as a safety measure. Most nerve blocks are done with the patient lying face down. You will be awake during the procedure. Next, the area where the nerve block will be done will be cleaned and sterilized. The doctor will numb this area with medication. An X-ray machine (fluoroscopy) is used to help guide where the needle is placed.

It is important to stay still during your procedure. The doctor may speak with you during the nerve block. Nerve blocks usually take less than 30 minutes. Afterwards you will be monitored for 15-30 minutes in the Post Recovery Care Unit before you can go home.
Side effects and risks
All nerve blocks have risks and this treatment is not guaranteed to help your pain.

Common side effects include:
› A few days with more pain
› Bruising
› Numbness
› Swelling near the injection site

Other risks include:
› Allergic reaction
› Bleeding
› Infection
› Seizure
› Nerve or spinal cord damage or paralysis (loss of movement) – (these are rare)

If you get a corticosteroid injection and are diabetic, this may cause higher blood sugar levels.
What to expect and what to do afterwards
You may be sore or have more pain before you feel better. Nerve blocks may take from a few days to 2 weeks to help with pain. For normal discomfort after a nerve block, use ice (3-4 times for up to 20 minutes each time) for the first 24 hours and avoid strenuous (hard) activities. You may take additional pain medication if recommended by your doctor.

Activities
Take it easy and cut down on your usual activities, including work, for 24-48 hours after your nerve block unless told otherwise by your nurse or doctor.

You can go back to your normal activities in about 1-3 days.

For 24 hours after your nerve block, do not:
› Drive or operate machinery
› Drink alcohol
› Act as a main caregiver for another person
› Sign legal documents
Medications and blood sugar levels

Take your medications as usual after your procedure.

If you have diabetes and have had a steroid injection, you should monitor your blood sugar levels closely after your procedure.

Emergency situations

Go to your nearest Emergency Department right away if you have:

› Signs of infection at the injection site such as redness, swelling, or heat
› Bleeding at the injection site
› Allergic reaction
› New severe (really bad) headache
› New trouble with bowel/bladder control or leg weakness
About repeating nerve blocks
Some nerve blocks may be repeated. Your doctor will decide when it makes sense to repeat your nerve block(s) by looking at:
› How much pain relief you get
› How long the nerve block lasts
› Any side effects you have

For more information:
Call the Chronic Pain Service to talk with your doctor or nurse, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at 902-473-7672, and press extension 3.

What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.
Questions for my healthcare provider:
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Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information go to http://library.novascotia.ca

Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.
Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

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www.nshealth.ca

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute healthcare or medical advice.
If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.