

# PATIENT EDUCATION

## PERIPHERAL NERVE BLOCK Instructions for Pre-Operative Review

### Overview

Nerve blocks affect nerves that control movement, pain, and normal sensation. A nerve block can last from two to 36 hours, depending on the medication used. Your anesthesia care provider will explain how long he or she expects the block to last. Weakness usually wears off first, followed by the sensation of tingling and heaviness, but this can vary. When a nerve block begins to wear off, anesthetic effects are completely gone within 60 minutes. Be sure to begin taking your prescribed oral pain medication before the nerve block wears off.

### What will I experience during the block?

You may notice some bruising at the site where the block was given. You also may experience numbness of the affected area or limb, tingling, heaviness (i.e., the limb feels heavy to you), weakness or the inability to move the affected arm or leg, and feeling as if your arm or leg has “fallen asleep.” If you experience continued side effects that you believe are block related for longer than 48 hours, please call your healthcare provider.

### What will the postoperative care include? (RN to check box as applicable)

**Instructions for any block involving the leg/foot:** Do not bear weight on the affected leg until the block wears off and then only as directed by your surgeon. Use caution and assistance when standing or trying to move or walk to reduce the risk of falling. Use crutches with help until you are certain your leg has returned to normal and you can manage the crutches.

**Instructions for any block involving the shoulder or arm:** You will go home with your arm in a sling. This should be worn until the block has completely worn off or longer if required by your surgeon. It is helpful to sleep in a recliner chair with pillows under your arm or in bed with your head elevated and your arm supported by pillows.

### Information specific to interscalene or supraclavicular blocks:

You may experience shortness of breath, hoarseness, blurred vision, unequal pupils, and drooping of your face on the same side that the block was performed. These are common side effects and should go away when your block wears off.

### How do I protect my affected arm or leg?

- You will not be able to feel pain, pressure, or extremes of temperatures in the affected limb until the block wears off and are at risk for injuring your limb (e.g., you could burn your limb on an extremely hot surface and not feel it).
- When resting, periodically reposition your blocked limb to avoid placing prolonged pressure on it. You may need help to do this.
- While sleeping, you may need pillows or padding to avoid rolling onto the limb or putting too much pressure on it.
- If you have a cast or tight dressing on the limb, check the color of your fingers or toes periodically and call you surgeon if they look dusky or dark colored.
- In cold weather, be sure to protect your extremity from the cold until sensation returns.

### Call you doctor immediately if you have:

- **severe or prolonged shortness of breath, or**
- **pain that is not controlled with the pain medicine**

### Resources:

UPMC Peripheral Nerve Blocks. University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

<https://www.upmc.com/HealthAtoZ/patienteducation/Documents/nerveblockinfusion.pdf>. Accessed April 12, 2011.

Wright, I., (2011). Peripheral nerve blocks in the outpatient surgery setting. AORN Journal, 94, 59-74. Doi:10.1014/j.aorn2011.02.011