

Contact details

The length of time your arm will stay numb, weak or heavy can vary, however, we expect normal function to return 24 hours after the initial nerve block.

If your arm is still numb or heavy after two days (48 hours) then please contact us: call Hawke's Bay Hospital on 06 878 8109 and ask the operator to connect you to the Anaesthetist on-call phone.

Once connected, tell them you have had a nerve block to your arm or leg which hasn't worn off and tell them the above details regarding the side, type, time and date of your nerve block. The anaesthetist may ask you some other questions and may either give you some advice, recommend you see your GP or ask you to come to the hospital for a check-up.

Very rarely, serious complications may occur in the first few days after a nerve block and surgery. If you experience any of the following, please see a doctor immediately:

- Severe or ongoing shortness of breath and/or chest pain.

- Any discolouration (blue or grey-looking) in the arm (fingers) or leg (toes).
- Any signs of infection (e.g. fever; redness and/or swelling) around the injection site or arm/leg.
- Severe pain that is not controlled with the oral pain relief medicine.

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Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

Te Matau a Māui Hawke's Bay

Peripheral nerve block

Patient information

Peripheral nerve block

You have had a nerve block to your arm or leg today as part of your anaesthetic care.

Block Side: LEFT / RIGHT ARM / LEG

Block Type: _____

Block Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Block Time: ____ : ____ AM / PM

Overview

Peripheral nerve blocks are a type of regional anaesthesia used by anaesthetists. Local anaesthetic medication is injected near a specific nerve or bundle of nerves to block sensations of pain from a specific area of your body (like your arm or leg). It is used to decrease pain during surgery and as you heal afterwards.

The nerve block will make your arm or leg feel weak, numb and heavy. This feeling usually lasts for 6 - 12 hours, but can last for up to 48 hours. Usually the muscle weakness wears off first, then the tingling, and finally you may start to notice some discomfort. However, this may occur in any order.

When the feeling returns to your arm or leg it is normal to need some oral pain

relief, and you will be given a prescription for this with your discharge papers.

Start your pain relief medication as soon as you feel the nerve block begins to wear off.

Continue oral pain relief medications as you need them, as prescribed. Please ask your nurse or doctor if you have any questions about this before you leave the hospital.

Protecting yourself and the numb arm or leg

While your arm or leg is numb, weak or heavy please be very careful to protect it until the feeling returns to normal.

While you are awake, change the position of your arm or leg often (for example, every hour or so). This helps to prevent putting too much pressure on the arm or leg for long periods of time.

Be very careful not to touch your arm or leg against anything hot (e.g. heat pack, heater, or oven) while it is numb as you could burn it without realising. Sometimes placing a cold pack (ice) on your arm or leg may reduce swelling after surgery. Do

not place cold packs on your arm or leg for long periods of time (more than 15 minutes at a time every hour), as it may cause an ice burn injury.

Unless instructed by your surgeon after the operation, do not use the arm or leg until the nerve block wears off. Do not attempt to drive until the block has completely worn off and when it has been at least 24 hours after your anaesthetic and surgery.

Arm

You should keep your arm in a sling to avoid injury. Also, be careful not to lie on your arm when you go to sleep.

Leg

You should not put your weight on the leg or foot (e.g. walk on it) until the block has worn off, otherwise you may fall. If you are given a brace to wear, be sure to wear it as directed. Have someone help you get in and out of bed, and when walking to the bathroom. Keep the leg elevated (e.g. raised up on a pillow) when sitting or lying down, if this is instructed by your surgeon.