

Notes

My Appointment

Date: _____

Time: _____

Contact Number

416-530-6000 ext. _____

Surgery and Regional Anesthesia (Nerve Block)

at St. Joseph's Health Centre

July 2008



Surgery and Regional Anesthesia (Nerve Block)

What is regional anesthesia?

Regional anesthesia is a type of anesthetic that is also known as a 'nerve block.' A nerve block involves using local anesthetic medication to 'freeze' a set of nerves so only the part of your body needing surgery is made numb.

Why should I have a nerve block?

A nerve block can numb the area of the body being operated on for 3 - 16 hours. It provides excellent pain relief after surgery and reduces the need for narcotic pain medications that can be associated with nausea, drowsiness and constipation. Some surgeries (eg. carpal tunnel release, AV fistula creation) can be performed under regional anesthesia alone. A nerve block can also be done in combination with a general anesthetic. When a nerve block is performed prior to general anesthesia, less anesthetic vapour and narcotic medication is required. This lowers the risk of side effects from general anesthesia and you may potentially leave the hospital sooner.

Will having a nerve block hurt?

Regional anesthesia involves placing a small needle near the nerves that supply the part of your body being operated on.

This might cause a bit of discomfort, but medicine may be given prior to and during the nerve block to help you relax and be comfortable.

On injection of the medication used for the block, you may initially feel some pressure at the needle site but any discomfort will quickly pass.

Will I be awake during the operation?

In order to minimize complications, the nerve block itself must be performed while you are still awake. After the nerve block the anesthetist may administer more intravenous medication to keep you relaxed and comfortable during the surgery.

When a nerve block is combined with a general anesthetic, you will be completely asleep during surgery.

Is regional anesthesia safe?

As with general anesthesia, serious risks associated with regional anesthesia are rare. Sterile technique is employed to minimize the risk of infection.

Minor bruising or in rare cases, a hematoma (pocket of bleeding) may develop.

Rarely, some patients (< 1%) develop "pins and needles" in the area previously blocked by the local anesthetic. This can last for 3 - 4 weeks following surgery. Injection of local anesthetic into the bloodstream or needle injury to structures near the nerves being blocked may occur in rare situations.

Overall, regional anesthesia is a very safe technique when performed by an anesthetist in a monitored setting.

Summary

The main benefits of regional anesthesia are:

1. Providing excellent pain relief after surgery.
2. Avoiding or reducing the side effects of general anesthesia.

When performed by an anesthetist, regional anesthesia is a safe technique that usually involves minimal discomfort. The nerve block cannot be performed without your informed consent. If you have further questions regarding the details of the nerve block, your anesthetist will be happy to answer them.