



Missoula Bone and Joint Surgery Center
Patient Information:
NERVE BLOCKS

What is a nerve Block?

This is a type of anesthesia in which a medication is injected around nerves to prevent or help control pain. It prevents the nerve impulses from reaching the central nervous system. Sometimes the area will be completely numb and you will be unable to move it. Or there may be a tingly, “pins and needles” sensation like your arm or leg is “asleep” and you may have some movement.

How long do the numbness, tingling, and/or inability to move last?

Depending on the type of block and type and amount of medication used, a block can last from 12-36 hours. Ask your anesthesiologist what to expect. Usually the feeling and movement will come back gradually. This is similar to the numbness you have when you are injected with Novocaine at the dentist’s office.

Do I need to take any special precautions if I receive a block?

Yes. With all blocks, be very careful not to bump, burn, injure, or cut off the circulation to the arm or leg blocked because, since you will be numb, you could damage the area without knowing. Check for signs of poor circulation, such as abnormal color (pale, purple, or blue). You will also need to take other more specific precautions depending on the type of nerve block.

Will I still need pain medication if I’ve had a nerve block?

Yes. If you experience total numbness, most likely the block will gradually wear off. Begin pain medicine when you begin getting some sensation or tingling. If you still have no feeling or tingling by the time you go to bed, take a dose of pain medicine prior to going to sleep for the night, because the block will likely begin to resolve during the night. Then take as needed.

Please refer to the instructions listed below concerning your specific type of block.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Axillary/Supraclavicular– Wear your sling at all times until the feeling and movement have returned to normal, or as instructed by your surgeon.

Interscalene – Wear your sling at all times until the feeling and movement are normal, or as instructed by your surgeon. This block may affect your diaphragm, an important breathing muscle; therefore, every hour take several deep breaths and cough to keep the lungs expanded and oxygen levels normal. You may also experience some numbness and/or tingling of your neck and face on the “blocked” side, a hoarse voice and/or drooping of the eye, cheek and mouth on the affected side. All of these symptoms are temporary and will resolve as the block wears off.

Popliteal (below the knee) and Ankle blocks – Use crutches and do not put weight on your foot until feeling, movement, and strength have returned to normal, or as instructed by your surgeon.

Femoral – This block affects the entire leg (thigh, knee, lower leg, and foot). Use crutches and do not put any weight on the blocked leg until the feeling, movement, and strength are normal, or as instructed by your surgeon. Be extra cautious when first bearing weight, because your sense of leg position may take longer to return.