

Caudal Block pain relief for children

This leaflet explains more about caudal blocks, including the benefits and risks. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

What is a caudal block?

It is a pain-relieving injection at the base of the back into the caudal canal which is performed while your child is under general anaesthetic. The caudal canal is the lowest portion of the epidural space, below the lower end of the spinal cord. The medicine injected is a local anaesthetic that blocks the pain messages from the surgical site travelling along the pain nerves to the brain.

Why should your child have a caudal block?

It normally gives pain relief for three to 12 hours. It numbs the lower half of the body (from the navel or belly button downwards) and so is used for surgery on the lower abdomen, groin or legs. A caudal block is combined with general anaesthesia so your child will still be asleep for their operation, but they will need lower doses of painkillers.

How is a caudal block performed?

After your child is asleep, they will be turned on their side and their lower back will be carefully cleaned. Under sterile conditions, the anaesthetist will insert a small needle into the base of the back and inject the painkillers. The needle is then removed.

What are the risks?

Caudal blocks have been used regularly in children for more than 30 years and have an excellent safety record. Several large studies in the UK and abroad have confirmed that caudal blocks are very safe.

Are there any side effects?

Failure: in a small number of children it may not be possible to perform the caudal block or it may not work. In this case, your child will be given other painkillers to keep them comfortable.

Numbness or weakness: for the three to 12 hour period that the caudal block is working your child may have numb, weak or tingling legs. You should supervise them closely if they are crawling or walking and keep them away from anything hot or sharp as they will not feel pain in the same way as normal. They may also have difficulty passing urine (weeing), so a small number of children need a catheter into the bladder to help them pass urine. All these effects will wear off as the block wears off.

Bleeding, infection or nerve damage: As mentioned above, caudal blocks are safe and the risk of bleeding or nerve damage is extremely low. Infection is very unlikely as they are done under sterile conditions in the operating theatre.

Are there any reasons your child shouldn't have a caudal block?

If your child has any abnormalities of their back or spine then you should tell the anaesthetist before their operation, as a caudal block might not be suitable for them.

Useful sources of information

Some of the information for this leaflet has been provided by the Royal College of Anaesthetists and you can get more

information about your child's anaesthetic (including age appropriate leaflets, activities and a resource for children with learning difficulties) from the College at <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patient-information/patient-information-resources/information-children-parents-carers>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please call us:

Jungle Ward	020 8725 2034
Nicholls	020 8725 2098
Frederick Hewitt	020 8725 2081
Pinckney	020 8725 2082

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

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