

Local Anaesthetic Nerve Blocks for Children

This leaflet explains more about local anaesthetic nerve 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 nerve block?

It is an injection of numbing local anaesthetic given around a nerve. It is used to reduce pain following surgery. This is done by an experienced anaesthetist when your child is under a general anaesthetic.

Why should your child have a nerve block?

A nerve block can provide very good pain relief after your child's operation, allowing them to recover faster and reducing the need for stronger pain medicines, such as morphine.

How is a nerve block performed?

After your child is asleep, the nerve to be blocked is located with an ultrasound machine. This area is cleaned and the anaesthetist will inject local anaesthetic around the nerve as a single injection under sterile conditions. The needle is then removed. For more complex surgery a small tube, called a catheter, is placed next to the nerve. The catheter is attached to a pump which will deliver a continuous dose of local anaesthetic. The local anaesthetic will numb and reduce the amount of pain your child might have after surgery or following their injury.

How long will the nerve block last?

Pain relief from a single injection of local anaesthetic can last between two to 18 hours depending on the site and the drugs used.

If your child has an infusion, this may be used between one to four days depending on the type of surgery. The nurses on the ward will monitor your child closely. The amount of local anaesthetic infused each day can be adjusted to ensure your child is comfortable and before the infusion is stopped, the nurses will make sure your child is able to have other pain medicines to keep him or her comfortable. When your child no longer needs the infusion, the tube will be removed. This is not painful and the nurse will use a wipe or spray to make the sticky dressing easier and more comfortable to remove.

What are the risks?

Nerve blocks have been used regularly in children and adults for pain relief after surgery and have an excellent safety record. Several large studies in the UK and abroad have confirmed that nerve blocks are very safe.

Are there any side effects?

Incomplete nerve block: A nerve block does not guarantee your child won't have some pain. This may be because the nerve is not completely numbed by the local anaesthetic or the area of surgery is not numbed by the nerve that is being blocked. If this occurs, the anaesthetist or the pain management teams will work out a way to help prevent the pain. This may be by giving additional doses of pain medications or, if they have a nerve infusion, increasing the amount of local anaesthetic.

Muscle weakness and numbness: Your child may have a heavy feeling in the area of their body affected by the nerve block. If this is the legs, they may find it difficult to move, although most children can still move around in bed. As the block wears off, they may feel a tingling sensation.

Bleeding, infection or nerve damage: As mentioned above, nerve blocks are safe and the risk of bleeding or nerve damage is extremely low. Short term nerve damage (longer than 48 hours) occurs in fewer than 1 in 10 nerve blocks. The vast majority of those affected (92 to 97%) recover within four to six weeks. 99% of those have recovered within a year. Permanent nerve damage is rare and precise numbers are not available. An estimate from the information we have suggests it happens between 1 in 2,000 and 1 in 5,000 nerve blocks.

Local anaesthetic toxicity: This is a rare but potentially serious complication due to excessively high levels of local anaesthetic medicine in the blood. Symptoms include confusion, dizziness, metallic taste in the mouth, tinnitus (ringing in ears), tingling around lips and very rarely seizures (fits). These problems are avoided by carefully calculating your child's dose according to his or her weight.

Can any child have a nerve block?

If your child has any problems with blood clotting, is taking blood thinning medicines or has had a previous allergic reaction to local anaesthetic, then you should tell the anaesthetist before their operation, as a nerve block might not be suitable for them. If a nerve block is not suitable for your child, the anaesthetist will use a different method to keep your child comfortable.

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 contact the paediatric wards:

Paediatric Intensive Care Unit	020 8725 2431
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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk).

The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

