

# The Benefits of Regional Anesthesia for AV Fistulas



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## What is regional anesthesia?

Regional anesthesia is a type of anesthetic that is also called a 'nerve block.' A nerve block of the arm means injecting anesthetic (freezing) medication around nerves using a needle in the lower neck or shoulder region so that only your arm needing surgery is numb. This usually takes about 5-10 minutes and works within 15-30 minutes. Your arm will go numb which will let the surgeon do the surgery pain-free.

## Why should I have a nerve block?

Nerve blocks provide excellent anesthesia during surgery. They also give you effective pain relief after surgery.

If you have a nerve block you might not need a general anesthetic. If you do not have general anesthesia there is less chance that you will have nausea or sleepiness after your surgery. You might be able to go home sooner.

Sometimes we give a nerve block and a general anesthetic. We do this to give you good pain relief after surgery once you have recovered from general anesthesia.

Using regional anesthesia with general anesthesia together also lets us use less of the general anesthetic drug. This lowers the chance of side effects people sometimes have with general anesthesia such as:

- Nausea
- Sleepiness
- Constipation

## Will having a nerve block hurt?

Regional anesthesia means placing a small needle in the lower neck or shoulder region. This might cause you a bit of discomfort, but we will give you medicine when we do the nerve block and during surgery to help you relax.

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## **Will it work?**

Regional anesthesia has a very high success rate. The anesthetist and the surgeon always check that the block is working before surgery. Very rarely, if the nerve block does not work, a general anesthetic can be given before surgery. Even if this happens, the nerve block will greatly bring down your pain after your surgery.

## **Will I be awake during the operation?**

Having surgery under regional anesthesia means that the part of your body that will be operated upon (your arm) will be numb during the surgery (and often for a few hours after the surgery). Some patients prefer to be awake during surgery. Others prefer to be sedated (asleep). It is your choice. During your surgery you can be as awake or as sedated as you want. You never get to see the surgery itself because a large drape is always placed between you and the surgeon.

## **How long will the nerve block last?**

Your arm will stay numb for 24-48 hours depending on the local anesthetic (freezing) medication we use.

## **Are there side effects?**

As with any anesthetic, including general anesthesia (where you are asleep) there are some possible side effects.

### **Rarely:**

- Temporary hoarseness and/or a droopy eyelid with warm dry skin over the face.
- “Pins and needles” sensation in the arm for 4-6 weeks after surgery. But a nerve block gives you much better pain control and decreases side effects as nausea and sleepiness compared to general anesthesia.

### **Very Rarely:**

- Difficulty breathing, which means being admitted to hospital and monitored. Some of these people might need a temporary chest tube to re-expand the lung. This is very rare.

## **Can I say 'no' to having a nerve block?**

Yes. We can only tell you about your choices. We will advise you to have surgery with regional anesthesia (nerve block) if we think it gives the best anesthetic conditions with the least side effects. In some rare situations general anesthesia may be much riskier compared to having surgery with a nerve block. In these cases we would strongly advise you to have a nerve block for surgery.

## **After Your Surgery**

Your arm would be numb for 24-48 hours depending on the medication we use.

During these 48 hours it's important to have someone take care of you because you will not be able to use your operated arm as you normally would. . Remember to protect your arm from getting hurt by accident with the arm sling we will give you.

## **What should I do if I have a problem?**

Call (416) 340-3155 and ask to speak to the anesthesia resident on call or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if the following happens:

- If you have any difficulty breathing
- If your arm stays numb longer than 48 hours

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