The Benefits of a Nerve Block for AV Fistula Surgery

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

• what a nerve block is
• the benefits of getting a nerve block
• what to expect
• what to do in case of a problem
What is a nerve block?
A nerve block is an anesthetic (a type of medicine) that numbs a certain area of your body. It’s also called regional anesthesia.

To numb your arm for surgery, your doctor injects the medicine in your lower neck or shoulder area. The medicine numbs or freezes the nerves that lead to your arm. It usually takes about 15 to 30 minutes to work. When your arm is numb, your surgeon can do the surgery, and you won’t feel any pain.

What are the benefits of a nerve block?

• A nerve block works very well to keep you from feeling pain during surgery. It also provides you with good pain relief after your surgery.

• If you have a nerve block you might not need a general anesthetic. A general anesthetic makes you fall asleep during surgery. If you don’t have general anesthesia there is less chance that you will have nausea or sleepiness after your surgery. This means you may be able to go home sooner.

• Sometimes we need to give you both a general anesthetic and nerve block. Using them together lets us use less of the general anesthetic. This lowers the chance of side effects people sometimes have with general anesthesia such as:
  ▪ nausea
  ▪ sleepiness
  ▪ constipation

Will getting a nerve block hurt?
You may feel a little pain when you are injected, but we give you medicine to help you relax before the nerve block and during surgery.
What if it doesn’t work?
This happens very rarely. Your anesthesiologist (doctor that gives you the nerve block) and the surgeon always check that the nerve block is working before surgery. In the rare case that it doesn’t work, you will get a general anesthetic. Even if this happens, the nerve block will provide good pain relief after your surgery.

Will I be awake during the surgery?
Some patients prefer to be awake during surgery. Others prefer to be sedated (or asleep). It’s your choice. During your surgery you can be as awake or as sedated as you want. You never get to watch the surgery happen because a large drape is always placed between you and your surgeon.

What can I expect after my surgery?
Your arm will be numb for 12 to 36 hours depending on the medicine we use. It’s important to have someone help take care of you during this time because you won’t be able to use your arm as you would normally. Wear the arm sling we give you to protect it from getting hurt.

If you get a general anesthetic, you must have someone take you home and stay with you for 24 hours after your surgery.

Are there side effects?
There are some possible side effects with any anesthetic, including general anesthesia. But, they are rare.

Rare side effects:
• a hoarse throat, droopy eyelid and/or warm, dry face skin for a short time after surgery
• a tingling (also sometimes called pins and needles) feeling in your arm for 4 to 6 weeks after surgery
Very rare side effects:
• trouble breathing. In this case you are admitted to hospital. Some people may need a temporary chest tube to re-expand their lung.

Can I say ‘no’ to a nerve block?
Yes. We can only tell you about your choices.

We advise you to have surgery with a nerve block because it will give you the best pain control with the least side effects. In some rare cases, general anesthesia may be much riskier than having surgery with a nerve block. In these cases we strongly advise you to have a nerve block.

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:
• you have any trouble breathing
• your arm stays numb longer than 48 hours

Please call 416 340 3155 if you have any questions or concerns.

Department of Anesthesia and Pain Management
Toronto General Hospital
200 Elizabeth Street
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2C4

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