

Brachial Plexus Block

July 2014

Patient Information

Your anaesthetic for shoulder, arm or hand surgery

- What is a Brachial Plexus Block?

- What can I expect before the anaesthetic?

- What can I expect during the anaesthetic?

- What are the risks of the technique?

- What can I expect after the operation?

- What should I do when I get home?

What is a Brachial Plexus Block?

Your anaesthetist will give you an injection of local anaesthetic painkiller either in your neck for shoulder surgery, or around your collar bone or armpit for surgery to the arm or hand. This is called a Brachial Plexus Block and will numb all the nerves necessary to provide safe and excellent pain relief during and after your operation.



What can I expect before the anaesthetic?

Your anaesthetist will see you on the ward before you go to theatre, and will discuss the anaesthetic options available to you and answer any questions you may have.

What can I expect during the anaesthetic?

When you arrive in the anaesthetic room you will have routine monitors connected to measure your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen. The anaesthetist will put a fine plastic tube into a vein in your arm. This will be used to give you a drug to make you relax prior to numbing your shoulder, arm or hand and can be used to give anaesthetic drugs later. You may be given oxygen to breathe.

Your neck or armpit will then be exposed and cleaned with a cold solution. The anaesthetist will numb the skin with a small injection which may sting a little. Once the skin is numb another needle is used to inject the local anaesthetic painkiller around the nerves.

The needle may be attached to a small machine called a nerve stimulator, which is used to find the correct place around the nerves. When this is switched on it may make your arm twitch or jerk. This is painless and entirely normal and as soon as the local anaesthetic is injected this will stop. A painless ultrasound probe may also be used to view the nerves.

You may notice your arm or hand becoming increasingly weak and numb over a period of time (20-30 mins). You will now receive a general anaesthetic (to send you off to sleep) which would have been discussed with you previously. If however, you wish to be awake or if the anaesthetist thinks it is important for you not to have a general anaesthetic, you will receive sedation to make you feel relaxed and comfortable during the operation.

Brachial Plexus Block



What are the risks of this technique?

This is a very safe method of anaesthetic which provides excellent pain relief both during and after your operation. It can reduce the unpleasant side effects sometimes associated with general anaesthesia.

The injection is aimed at producing weakness and numbness of the arm or hand which should disappear within 24 hours. Expected short lived side effects from the neck injection include droopy eyelids and hoarse voice.

Nerve damage and other complications are extremely uncommon but if you already have abnormal sensations in your arm or wish to have more information, you should mention this to your anaesthetist who will be able to discuss this further with you before your operation.



What can I expect after the operation?

After the operation your shoulder, arm or hand will feel numb, heavy and pain free. These sensations may last for anything between 6-18 hours. This is quite normal and is nothing to worry about, this numb feeling will wear off within 24 hours. As the numbness starts to wear off you may start to feel tingling, pins and needles.

Please take the prescribed painkillers **regularly for the first 24 hours** and whenever necessary thereafter.

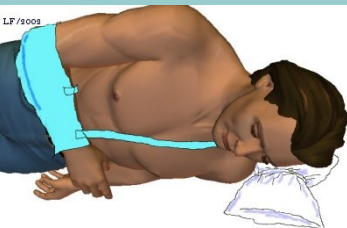
What should I do when I get home?

Your arm will have no pain or temperature sensation whilst it is numb. **DO NOT use this arm to touch anything hot, cold or sharp, carry objects or smoke.** Do not use your arm until you feel it is back to normal.

Keep your arm in the sling provided; this is to protect it until the numbness has completely worn off. Do not apply pressure on this arm or sleep on that side.

If you want to know more go to www.rcoa.ac.uk and click on Patient Link.

If you have any worries about the numbness in your arm, once you have been discharged, please contact 01293 781266 (SASA LLP).



Drs Barbara Bray, David Burwell, Somi Desikan, Visakha Gunasekera, R Kumar, Fiona Lamb, Claire Mearns, Gordon Morton, Patrick Morgan, Simon Parrington, Sarah Rafferty, Sameer Ranjan, Anna Riccoboni, Fred Sage, Andrea Stewart, Fred. Van Damme.