

Peripheral Nerve Blocks

Decision aid

This decision aid is meant to help you decide what type of anesthesia is right for you. It explains the benefits and risks of peripheral nerve blocks. Read this decision aid, fill out the question boxes, and talk with your anesthesiologist to help you decide what type of anesthesia is your best choice.

What are peripheral nerve blocks?

- Anesthesia blocks pain during your surgery.
- Peripheral nerve blocks numb parts of your body. You may stay awake or receive a sedative during the surgery. You may recall parts of or all of the procedure.
- You may have a general anesthetic in addition to your peripheral nerve block for your procedure.
- For a peripheral nerve block, local anesthetic drugs are injected near a nerve or group of nerves to block pain in the part of the body supplied by the nerve. You may get an injection of the anesthetic drugs, or a nerve catheter (thin tube) may be put in to help deliver the drugs.
- Peripheral nerve blocks are used to provide anesthesia for operations on the hands, arms, feet, legs, or other types of procedures. They are also used for pain relief after surgery.
- You may feel pain or tingling as the anesthesiologist injects the local anesthetic.
- During your surgery, your anesthesiologist will closely watch how much oxygen is in your blood, how sleepy you are, your breathing, blood pressure and heart rate.

What are the possible benefits of peripheral nerve blocks?

Some possible benefits of peripheral nerve blocks are:

- You may choose to stay awake or a little sleepy during your surgery.
- The level of sedation can be adjusted to your level of comfort.
- Improved pain relief after the procedure compared to pain medicine.
- Less nausea, less vomiting and feel less sleepy with regional blocks compared to general anesthesia.
- You may recover and be discharged quicker after your procedure compared to general anesthesia. This lets you to go home sooner.

1. What benefits of peripheral nerve block matter most to me?

What are the possible risks of peripheral nerve blocks?

All types of anesthesia have some risks. These risks depend on things such as your age, your health, the type of surgery and how you respond to the medicines used. Older people or people with conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obstructive sleep apnea, nerve problems or obesity are at higher risk. Talk to your anesthesiologist about your risks for anesthesia and surgery.

Risks **specific to peripheral nerve blocks** include:

Minor Risks

- Pain, tingling or a strange feeling that is not related to the surgery. 2 to 10 in 1,000 people may feel mild pain, tingling or a strange sensation that is not from their procedure.
- Muscle weakness – You will most likely feel some temporary muscle weakness right after you get the nerve block. After some nerve blocks for shoulder surgery, paralysis of your diaphragm (breathing muscle) may cause you to feel short of breath. Muscle function generally goes back to normal after the block wears off.
- You may need both a peripheral nerve block and general anesthesia to get the best level of sedation and pain relief.
- Redness, swelling, blisters or other kinds of skin reactions. These may be from tape, monitors, intravenous catheter or allergic reaction to medicines. A bruise, a sore spot or infection at the injection site.

Major Risks - all very rare

- Nerve injury – 2 to 9 in 10,000 people may have nerve damage as a result of peripheral nerve blocks. This may cause you to feel numb in that spot, or to have pain, feel tingling, or lose some feeling, or a limb may be paralyzed (not move).
- Collapsed lung (pneumothorax) – 2 in 10,000 people may have a collapsed lung after they have a peripheral nerve block *for shoulder, arm, or hand surgery*. A chest tube may need to be put in to treat this.
- Seizure – 1 to 4 in 10,000 people may have a seizure due to rapid absorption of the anesthetic drug.
- Heart attack/cardiac arrest – 2 in 100,000 people may have a heart attack.
- Stroke or brain damage – Very rare.
- Death – 2 in 100,000 people may die.

Put your risk in perspective:



**Risk of death in an airplane:
1 in 7,229**

2. What are my concerns about these possible risks?

What are the side effects after peripheral nerve blocks?

- Pain – You will feel some pain and discomfort from your surgery as the nerve block wears off. This can be controlled with pain medicine.
- Reduced muscle control and coordination – The anesthetic may cause you to have problems with muscle control and coordination, but these effects do not last long.

What are my choices?

- You need to have anesthesia for your procedure. You may have a choice of peripheral nerve block, epidural or spinal anesthesia, general anesthesia, or some combination of these. Talk about these options, and what you prefer and what concerns you, with your anesthesiologist and with your surgeon.
- There may be choices for post-procedure pain relief, such as peripheral nerve block or pain medicine.
- Your anesthesiologist and surgeon will decide if a peripheral nerve block is an appropriate choice for you. They will consider your medical condition, history and the procedure that you will have.

3. What questions and concerns do I have about my anesthesia and post-procedure pain relief options?

4. What other information do I need before I make my decision about my anesthesia care? Where can I get that information? Who can I ask?

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

Pre-Anesthesia Clinic:
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Do I understand the pros and cons of peripheral nerve block so I can decide if it's the right choice for me?

1. Peripheral nerve blocks numb parts of your body. You may remain awake during your procedure.
 - True False
2. Benefits of peripheral nerve block include:
 - Improved pain relief after the procedure compared to pain medicine.
 - Less nausea, less vomiting and feel less sleepy compared to general anesthesia.
 - You may recover and be discharged quicker after your surgery compared to general anesthesia; lets you to go home sooner.
 - All of the above.
3. Specific risks of peripheral nerve block include:
 - Temporary muscle weakness or permanent nerve injury.
 - Collapsed lung (with shoulder, arm or hand procedures).
 - Seizure.
 - All of the above.

Answers: 1) True; 2) All of the above; 3) All of the above

References

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