

Tacoma Anesthesia Associates

Regional Anesthesia

Peripheral Nerve Block Catheter Home Instructions

What is a peripheral nerve block?

When performing a peripheral nerve block, the anesthesiologist will inject numbing medication near a cluster of nerves to numb only the area of your body that requires surgery. It is used to decrease pain during surgery and as you heal afterward. Your limb will feel numb and weak.

What do I need to know while the nerve block is working?

While your nerve block is working, you need to be extra careful. You will not be able to feel much in the area that is numb, and you won't be able to detect if your limb gets injured. You may not be able to feel pain, pressure, or extreme temperatures until the nerve block wears off. So, you need to protect the numb area from injury.

- Don't try to use the affected limb until the nerve block wears off. It will be too weak.
- Don't operate heavy machinery or attempt to drive until the nerve block wears off.
- Don't let anything bump into the numb area or rest on it. You won't be able to feel if you're injured or if there's too much pressure on the numb area.
- Be careful about extreme temperatures. You may not be able to feel discomfort from touching something that is too hot or too cold. You could get a burn or cold injury without knowing it.

To help you stay safe, you need a caregiver present 24 hours a day every day while your nerve block is working.



*The On-Q pump has a white clip to turn it on and off for emergencies.
The catheter has a black tip on the end that you should observe upon removing the catheter.*

What should I do when I get home?

Once you get home, you will not be able to feel much in the limb that had the nerve block. You need to take extra care not to injure yourself. **Reposition yourself often.** This will help prevent you from putting too much pressure on the area. You may need help doing this task.

- If the nerve block was in your leg, **do not put weight on your leg or foot** until the block wears off unless directed by your doctor. You may fall and break a bone, because your leg muscles will be weak. Even if you're using crutches, ask for help until the nerve block has worn off. If you're given a brace to wear, be sure to wear a brace as directed. It can help you from falling. Have someone help you to get in and out of bed and when walking to the bathroom.
- If the nerve block was in your arm, wear your sling as directed until the block wears off. If your doctor says you can take your arm out of the sling, be sure to support your arm with the other hand. Be careful not to sleep directly on the arm with the nerve block.

You also need to check the area where the nerve block catheter enters the skin daily, without removing the bandages. Check for redness, swelling, severe tenderness, or pus which can be signs of infection.

What if I have pain at home?

The numbing medication may not relieve all the pain from your surgical procedure. **It is OK to take pain medication**, such as over the counter acetaminophen or your prescription pain medication from your doctor, even while the nerve block catheter is working. Please carefully follow the instructions on your prescription.

When will the nerve block wear off?

With a nerve block catheter, numbing medicine is given through a small catheter, a plastic tube about the size of a guitar string, that is placed under the skin. This thin catheter is attached to a small pump filled with numbing medicine. This pump is designed to deliver a continuous amount of numbing medicine over the course of 2-3 days. It is normal to experience an increase in pain 6-24 hours after the catheter is placed. This is because the numbing medicine that you are receiving through the pump is weaker than the numbing medicine initially used to place the nerve block.

What happens when the nerve block wears off?

Once the numbing medicine starts to wear off, the nerve block is mostly gone within an hour. You will notice a change in the way your limb feels – it may begin to feel less numb, less weak, and you may feel a tingly sensation as if it's "asleep." Once the numbing medicine begins to wear off, the pain comes back very quickly. **Take your pain pills once you notice this change** since it takes about 30-45 minutes for the pills to take effect. It may take 1-4 hours for the nerve block to completely wear off.

Can I take a bath with the nerve block catheter in place?

The adhesive bandages that keep the nerve block catheter in place need to stay dry. If the bandages get wet, the catheter may fall out too soon. Therefore, you cannot take a bath. You may sponge bath, making sure to keep the catheter and all of the dressings dry.

Fluid is leaking from the catheter, is something wrong?

No. It is somewhat common for fluid to leak where the catheter inserts into your skin. This leakage is the numbing medicine tracking back along the catheter. Do your best to keep the site dry. You may use a towel or gauze to soak up any extra fluid.

My catheter fell out, what do I do?

Examine the catheter to make sure the tip of the catheter has a dark mark. If you do not see this dark stripe, save the tubing that has come out and call the number above for the On-Call Home Pump Doctor. If you see the dark stripe, you may remove the rest of your bandages and discard everything in the trash. You should start taking pain medication pills once the catheter is out to prevent getting behind on pain control.

When does the catheter come out? After 3 days or once the medication in the pump is finished, whichever comes first. You may remove your catheter at any time before then, especially if told to do so by your doctor or if you no longer want or need your surgical site to feel numb. Regardless of medication status or your pain levels, you must remove the catheter if it has been in for longer than 3 days from time of discharge from the hospital.

How do I remove the catheter from my body?

Removing a catheter is easy and not painful. There are no stitches.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Gently remove all dressings, adhesive tape, and sticky glue surrounding the catheter to expose the insertion site where the catheter enters the skin.
3. Grasp the tubing near your skin with two fingers and gently pull the catheter out.
4. The catheter should glide out VERY EASILY. If you feel pain, resistance, or feel you need to use any force to pull the catheter out, STOP IMMEDIATELY. Leave the tubing as is and call the on-call doctor for further instruction.
5. About 2-3 inches of tubing will glide out of the skin before the tip of the catheter comes out. Carefully examine the tip of the catheter for a dark stripe (Figure 2) once the catheter is out. If there is no dark stripe at the end, save the tubing that has come out in a plastic bag and call the on-call doctor for further instruction. DO NOT CUT THE TUBING.
6. Once the tip is identified, dispose of all materials in the garbage (tubing, medication bag, dressings, etc.) You do not need to return any of the materials to OHSU.

Where can I learn more information?

To view 3 short informative videos about nerve blocks, how they are placed, and postoperative care, please go to www.happypatient.org in your internet browser. As these instructions are

adapted for Tacoma Anesthesia Associates from those on this website, do not refer to the online references for phone numbers or contact information.

What if I have questions at home?

A healthcare provider will contact you to check on your progress if you go home with a nerve block catheter.

For urgent conditions, including pain that is not well controlled, please call **(253) 403-1115** and ask for the “On-Call Home-Pump Doctor.” Most questions or problems can be handled over the phone. If you cannot reach the doctor on call by phone or are having an emergency, go to the nearest emergency room. If you are concerned about the surgical incision itself, please call your surgeon’s office.

When should I call my doctor?

**Use the white clip on the tubing to STOP THE PUMP then
call (253) 403-1115 IMMEDIATELY and
ask for the On-Call Home-Pump Anesthesiologist**

If you have:

- Infection at the catheter site (see Page 1)
- New Ringing/rumbling in your ear(s)
- Metallic taste or numbness in/around the mouth
 - Dizziness, agitation, nervousness
 - Hives
- Irregular breathing or heartbeat
- Shortness of breath or chest pain

IF YOUR SYMPTOMS ARE SEVERE, CALL 911