

Going Home After an Upper Extremity Nerve Block (Hand, Elbow, Shoulder)

If you have questions or concerns, please ask your physician or nurse.

Your physician has recommended a nerve block as the desired anesthesia for your surgery. A nerve block is a shot of numbing medicine that prevents you from feeling any pain at the site of surgery. This brochure explains the care needed after you leave the hospital. Carefully follow any instructions given to you by your surgeon and nurse.

Procedure

The nerve block may be given before or after your surgery. You will lose all feeling and movement in the arm where you have the surgery. This may last up to 24 hours.

For shoulder surgery, the numbing medicine is placed into the nerves just above the collarbone. The numbness will extend from your hand up through your shoulder.

Going home

Protect your arm

The nerve block can last up to 24 hours. During this time:

- **It is important to protect your shoulder, arm and hand from injury.**
- **You cannot control shoulder, arm or hand movement until the nerve block wears off.**
- You will not be able to tell if your arm is twisted or if anything is pushing against it.

Wear your arm sling to keep your arm in the proper position. Do this for the first 24 hours and for at least 3 to 6 hours after the numbing effects of the nerve block wear off.

The block may affect the way you sense your arm's position and location. You may feel like you are not sure where or how your arm is placed, or how it is positioned. Your arm may feel different or heavier. **This can affect your balance and increase your risk of falling.**

Until the block completely wears off and all feeling and movement is completely back to normal, please take special care to prevent falling.

Protect your shoulder, arm and hand from hot and cold temperatures. Your sense of hot and cold is also lessened until the block wears off.

If you have shoulder surgery, you may be given a cooling unit for your shoulder. The cooling unit helps relieve pain and swelling. Be sure to carefully follow the cooling unit guidelines.

Stay comfortable

- Begin to take your pain medicine as soon as you notice the block starting to wear off. The first sign may be some tingling. Take your first dose at that time, which may be around dinner time. If it is time for your next dose, take your pain medicine before you go to bed. Then, take the medicine on the schedule prescribed by your physician, as needed for pain.
- **Do not wait to feel severe pain.** It is much better to prevent the build-up of pain than to try to stop it once it is there.
- Contact your surgeon about any severe pain not controlled by your medicine.

Special instructions

Have someone with you at home after your surgery. **Remember that you will not have use of your arm.**

You may feel some hoarseness, upper eyelid droop, nose congestion and eye redness on the side of your surgery. These effects go away as the block wears off. Let your surgeon know if these signs last longer than 24 hours after your surgery.

You may feel some mild breathing discomfort. This goes away as the block wears off. If it does occur, you should rest and sleep with your head and upper body resting on two to three pillows. It may also be helpful to sit in a recliner, with your upper body elevated. Let your surgeon know if this breathing discomfort becomes worse and is not relieved by elevating your upper body.

Carefully follow any instructions given to you by your surgeon, anesthesiologist and nurse.

Please feel free to page the anesthesiologist 24 hours a day at 312.695.7039 if you have any questions about your anesthesia care.