Pain Management after Surgery: Nerve Block in Children

Information for patients, parents and carers

Nerve blocks are used for babies, children and teenagers during and after surgery to help them recover faster by providing good pain relief.

What is a nerve block?

A medicine called local anaesthetic is given around a nerve near the area of surgery, between the muscles or around a wound. This medicine numbs the nerves that go to a particular area of the body which lessens the feeling of pain where your child’s operation was. It may be given as a once-off dose or may be given continuously over a set period of time.

Why have a nerve block?

A nerve block can provide good pain relief because it can stop your child feeling pain in the area where they have had the surgery. Nerve blocks may have less side effects than other pain relief medicines.

What can my child expect after having a nerve block?

Your child may feel numb around the operation area. If this is in a limb, the whole arm or leg may feel numb. Sometimes the area may feel heavy and/or tingly. Your child may have this feeling for 4-6 hours after a nerve block was given. Some blocks can last as long as 36 hours depending on the medicine used in the block.

Weakness usually wears off first. This is often followed by the heavy and/or tingling feeling wearing off, although this can vary. Generally, muscle strength is not affected but the lack of normal feeling may make your child wobbly when standing or walking.

Your child should be comfortable enough to move as allowed, to breathe deeply and to cough.

Continuous delivery of local anaesthetic from a pump

Your child may have a small plastic tube (catheter) left near the area of the surgery. The catheter is taped or sometimes stitched so your child cannot pull it out.

Local anaesthetic is given through the catheter by a syringe pump or a balloon pump. The syringe/balloon pump starts giving the medicine once it is connected to your child’s catheter and will keep going until it is no longer needed.

If your child is allowed to have a bath or shower, please ask your child’s nurse to place the balloon pump in a plastic bag or leave it on a flat area outside of the bath/shower. Do not put the pump in the bath.

If your child is allowed to leave the ward, keep the balloon pump out of direct sunlight.

Your child will not go home with the catheter or syringe/balloon pump.

The catheter is usually taken out after no more than 2 days. This is not painful or distressing. Your child’s doctor will make sure your child has other pain relief medicine ordered.

How should I care for my child?

If your child had a nerve block that numbed the leg or legs, do not let your child walk until normal feeling returns. Help them walk until they are steady.

Watch your child closely until the block has worn off as the numb limb/area is at risk for being injured without them feeling it.

Give your child paracetamol (e.g. Panadol®) or other pain relief medicine as suggested
by your doctor if your child looks or feels sore.

Care at home
Your child should be able to go to school/child care/kindergarten the following day unless your doctor has given you other advice.

Your child should not play any sport or do physical education (PE) for 1 week after they have had a nerve block.

If your child needs strong pain relief medicines after they go home, your ward doctor will order these and you will be given information by the hospital pharmacist about them.

Key points to remember
- Nerve blocks give good pain relief during and after surgery
- If your child has a continuous delivery of local anaesthetic from a pump, it is taken out after 2 days
- Other pain relief medicines may be given to your child
- Your child will have their comfort checked regularly

More Information
If you have any other questions about nerve blocks, please ask your nurse or ask them to contact your child’s anaesthetist.

Remember, you know your child best and we rely on that to help us provide the best possible care for your child.

If at any time you are concerned about your child’s comfort please tell your nurse or doctor.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION
Contact a doctor, either your GP or at the Paediatric Emergency Department at the WCH, if your child has any of the following:
- Not voiding regularly, at least every 8 hours during the day
- Pain which does not get better with paracetamol or another prescribed pain relief medicine
- Numbness, tingling or heavy feeling for longer than 24 hours at the area where your child had a nerve block
- Redness, swelling, pain, bleeding or ooze from the area that the nerve block was given.

If your child needs to see a doctor in the first 6 weeks after having surgery please let them know that they had a nerve block.

Nurse to complete prior to discharge:

**Nerve Block Details**

Patient name: ........................................

Block date: ........................................

Type/area of block: ........................................

Continuous delivery via a syringe/balloon pump:

Start date: ........................................

End date: ........................................