

Intercostal Nerve Block Injections

More information is available at <http://www.fpmx.com.au/frankston-pain-management-services.html>

Q1 What is an intercostal nerve block?

Intercostal Nerve blocks are injections of anaesthetic and/or steroid around one or more nerves that lie beneath each rib and are performed to reduce pain and inflammation to allow improved exercise tolerance.

Q2 What is the purpose of a nerve block?

This outpatient procedure is used to treat pain arising from rib fractures, and post-operatively after breast, chest or abdominal surgery, and sometimes if there is cancer in the ribs. It can also be used to treat pain coming from irritated, compressed, scarred or damaged nerves after surgery, shingles or diabetes and many other causes. Nerve blocks can be diagnostic by confirming the origin of the pain. They may also be therapeutic in some patients by providing sustained pain relief and functional improvement by breaking the pain cycle and reducing inflammation around the affected nerve.

Q3 How is the injection done?

The skin is washed with antiseptic and 'numbed'. Nerve blocks (with or without sedation), are performed using ultrasound, fluoroscopy (xray) guided needle and anaesthetic/steroid placement close to the nerve. The injection feels like a pinch followed by a slight burning. If you experience pain during the procedure, your doctor will inject more local anaesthetic. Although the actual injection only takes a few minutes, please allow 1-2 hours to get ready for theatre, positioning, observation and recovery after the procedure.

Q4 What is the expected benefit?

Pain relief, which may last a few hours, days, weeks or many months. Shortly after the injection, you may notice your pain has gone or is much less.

Q5 What are the Risks?

Immediately after the treatment you may have temporary numbness, weakness and injection site tenderness for a few days. There is a small risk of bleeding, infection and nerve damage; however the vast majority of patients do not have any complications. There is also a small chance of puncturing the lung; if this occurs you may require an xray, hospital admission and possibly further treatment. Side effects from the injected steroid may include weight gain, increased blood sugar, fluid retention and immune suppression.

Q6 What should I worry about?

After the procedure, if you do feel sharp pain on breathing that is different to your previous pain, or moderate to severe shortness of breath, you should tell your nurse or doctor. If you difficulty breathing after you return home, you should call 000 for an ambulance and attend the nearest accident and emergency department.

Q7 How many injections will be needed?

If the injection does not fully relieve the symptoms in a week or two, a second injection or different treatment may be recommended.

Q8 What should I do after the procedure?

We advise patients to take it easy until the numbing medicine has worn off, then you can perform activity as tolerated. You may need someone to drive you home after some nerve blocks.

Q9 Can I go to work the next day?

Yes. Unless there are complications, you should be able to return to your work the next day. The most common thing you may feel is injection site soreness. Ice at the injection site will help with the soreness. You may also take ibuprofen or paracetamol for the discomfort.

Q10 What do I do next?

The aim of the intercostal nerve block is to reduce your pain to allow gentle stretching and graded exercise program. Other treatment options include physiotherapy, medications, TENS, epidural injections, radiofrequency or stimulation.

Important Notes:

You must not eat/drink for 4 hours before the procedure.

Please take your normal medicines with a sip of water except blood thinners (aspirin is OK), insulin and diabetic tablets.

Ask your doctor for specific instructions if you are taking these medicines.