

LUMBAR SYMPATHETIC BLOCK (ABLATION)

This page is all about lumbar sympathetic blocks, why we do them, what they do and what you should expect. More information is available at <http://www.fpmx.com.au/frankston-pain-management-services.html>

- Q1. What are the sympathetic nerves?** *The sympathetic nerves live next to your spine and travel with the blood vessels around the body. They are part of your subconscious nervous system that controls things like sweating and the size of your veins – they are responsible for the enlarged veins and sweaty feet on a hot day! They also provide sensation to your internal organs, such as liver, pancreas, ovaries and testicles.*
- Q2 What is a Sympathetic Block?** *It is an injection of local anaesthetic into the sympathetic nerve tissue that is located on either side of the spine (backbone) in the low back*
- Q3 What is the purpose?** *It is usually done to reduce pain, swelling, colour, sweating, to improve blood flow and improve mobility. It is mainly used in the treatment of caused by poor blood supply or the nerves themselves. It can be used to try and control sweating if your feet are excessively sweaty.*
- Q4 How is the block performed?** *The block is performed in an operating theatre, to reduce risk of infection, and using X-ray guidance, to allow accurate needle placement and reduce risk of injury to other structures. It is done with you lying 'good' side down or lying on your tummy. The skin is numbed with local anaesthesia. A needle is inserted through the skin and deeper tissues to deliver the medicine into the correct place. It can be uncomfortable, and sedation is available.*
- Q5 How long does it take?** *From admission to discharge it takes 2-4 hours, however the actual block takes about 20 minutes and you spend another 20-30 minutes in recovery before returning to the ward.*
- Q6 Will the injection hurt?** *There is some discomfort involved; however the skin and deeper tissues will be numbed with local anaesthetic. Injection site pain may last several days and is easily treated with paracetamol.*
- Q7 Will I be asleep?** *No, but you may be given sedation via a small needle put in the back of your hand.*
- Q8 What effects will I notice if everything is normal?** *Usually the first thing you will notice is that your leg may feel warmer, your pain is less intense, the foot may be more pink and veins in your treated leg are bigger.*
- Q9 What could go wrong?** *Potential side effects include temporary weakness in the leg, numbness in the groin, faintness and dizziness. The potential risks include bleeding, infection, spinal block, unwanted nerve injury and damage to nearby structures. The chance of a catastrophic problem is very small.*
- Q10 What should I worry about?** *After you leave the hospital, pain at the injection site is normal for a few days. Severe abdominal or back pain, fever and breathing difficulties are the main hazards. If you have any of these problems after leaving hospital, go to the nearest emergency department and tell them you have had a block.*
- Q11 How will I feel after I get home?** *It is very difficult to predict. Most patients feel sleepy because the pain has stopped them sleeping normally, and now with no pain, sleep happens. It is common to feel a little unbalanced when getting up for a while, so I advise that you take it easy for a few hours.*
- Q12 How soon can I eat and drink?** *When you feel like it.*
- Q13 How many blocks will be needed?** *Usually three local anaesthetic blocks will indicate whether you are going to get improvement from this treatment.*

*In some cases an **ABLATION** is performed that will give a block that lasts for some months. This is achieved by using heat, Botox or phenol which destroy the working part of the nerves. The side effects listed above may then last for some months*

Please make a review appointment in 2 - 4 weeks.