



Sympathetic Nerve Blocks/Injections

Sympathetic Nerve Blocks for Pain

A sympathetic nerve block can be an effective method for controlling chronic pain. This therapy targets the sympathetic nervous system, a series of nerves that spread out from your spine to your body to help control several involuntary body functions, or body functions that you have no control over. These include blood flow, digestion, and sweating.

When is a Sympathetic Nerve Block Needed?

A sympathetic nerve block can be used to diagnose or treat pain involving the nerves of the sympathetic nervous system. Examples of conditions for which a sympathetic nerve block might be used include:

1. Phantom pain after an amputation
2. Pain from spasms in the blood vessels after frostbite
3. Chronic tail bone pain, called coccydynia
4. Lingering pain after an attack of shingles
5. Complex regional pain syndrome, also called reflex sympathetic dystrophy
6. Raynaud's syndrome
7. Excessive sweating, called hyperhidrosis
8. Certain types of abdominal pain
9. Some types of face pain
10. Certain Headaches

Sympathetic Nerve Block Procedure

The location of your pain usually determines where you'll receive the nerve block. Your sympathetic nerves come together outside your spine area in thick networks of nerves called ganglions. If you have pain in the upper part of your body, you may get pain relief from blocking the in your neck area. If you have pain in the lower part of your body, a ganglion near the lower spine may be targeted with a lumbar sympathetic block.

This is what may happen during a sympathetic block procedure:

1. You will be asked to fast for about six hours before the procedure.
2. The medical team will start an intravenous line and monitor your vital signs carefully.
3. You may be given some medication through the IV line to make you relaxed and sleepy.
4. Before the actual block, you will be given a local anesthetic (numbing medicine).
5. X-rays may be used to help the specialist find the right ganglion.



6. Once the ganglion is located, it is blocked by injecting it with a local anesthetic solution with or without a steroid.

What to Expect After Your Sympathetic Nerve Block

A sympathetic nerve block is a relatively safe procedure. You can usually go home afterward and return to your normal activities after a day of rest. You will need to have someone drive you home.

Side effects after a sympathetic block may include, but are not limited to, temporary soreness, a feeling of warmth, or some weakness. If you've received a nerve block in the stellate ganglion (neck), you may experience some temporary voice changes, eyelid droop, or difficulty swallowing. Until swallowing is back to normal, avoid large bites of food and sip liquids carefully.

In some cases, the sympathetic block may need to be repeated to get the best possible response. These injections also have diagnostic benefit and can help determine if you may benefit from other medications.

Sympathetic blocks do not work for everyone, and the pain relief they give may decrease over time. However, sympathetic blocks may provide weeks or months of pain relief, and permanent relief is possible.

Examples of sympathetic nerve blocks include, but are not limited to, **stellate ganglion block, Celiac Plexus Block, Ganglion Impar Block, and Lumbar Sympathetic Plexus Block.**