

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 anesthesia for your surgery. A nerve block is a shot of numbing medication that prevents you from feeling any pain at the site of surgery. This brochure explains what to expect and how to care for yourself after you leave the hospital. Carefully follow any instructions your surgeon, anesthesiologist and nurse give you.

Procedure

Your care team may give you the nerve block before or after your surgery. You will lose all feeling and movement in the arm where you will have the surgery. This may last up to 24 to 48 hours.

For shoulder surgery, the numbing medication is put around the nerves just above the collarbone. The numbness will go from your hand up through your shoulder.

Going home

The nerve block can last 24 to 48 hours. **During this time, it is important to protect yourself from injury.**

Protect your arm

The nerve 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 positioned.

- You will not be able to control your 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. Keep it on until at least 3 to 6 hours after the numbing effects of the nerve block wear off.

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

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

Prevent falls

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, be extra careful to avoid a fall.

Have someone with you at home after your surgery. Remember that you will not be able to use your arm.

Stay comfortable

- Begin to take your pain medication as soon as you notice the block starting to wear off and you are starting to feel some discomfort or pain. Then, take the medication on the schedule prescribed by your physician, as needed for pain.
- Do not wait to feel severe pain. It is easier to prevent the buildup of pain than to try to stop it once it is there.
- Contact your surgeon about any severe pain that is not being managed by your medication.

Special instructions

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 to 48 hours after your surgery.

You may feel some mild breathing discomfort. This goes away as the block wears off. If you have breathing discomfort, rest and sleep with your head and upper body resting on 2 to 3 pillows. It may also help to sit in a recliner, with your upper body raised.

Let your surgeon know if the breathing discomfort gets worse and is not relieved by raising your upper body.

Contact information

Page the anesthesiologist 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at 312.695.7039 if you have any questions about your anesthesia care.