



Lumbar Sympathetic Block

WHY HAVE THIS PROCEDURE?

A lumbar sympathetic block is an injection of local anaesthetic into or around the sympathetic nerves, which make up your sympathetic nervous system.

The sympathetic nerves are located either side of the spine in the lower back. These nerves control many functions in our body such as blood flow, but can also send pain signals from peripheral tissue (from limbs, such as the arms or legs) to the spinal cord.

The lumbar sympathetic block is designed to reduce:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Colour changes
- Sweating
- Other unusual sensations/changes

The procedure aims to reduce these symptoms to the upper or lower limbs (arms or legs) to allow for improved comfort and mobility.

This procedure is normally undertaken in a cycle of three injections for optimal benefit.

THE PROCEDURE

- This will be undertaken in an operating theatre by one of our pain specialists unless otherwise indicated.
- An experienced anaesthetist may be present and may offer you a mild sedative if appropriate.
- You will be positioned lying on your front (face down).
- X-rays will be taken of your back to allow accurate placement of the needle(s) and reduce the risks of side effects.
- Your pain specialist will use local anaesthetic to numb your skin before the procedure begins.
- Please tell your pain specialist if you experience pain during the procedure.
- Once the needle is in position, local anaesthetic mixed with an anti-inflammatory steroid will be injected.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

You will be monitored in the recovery area by nursing staff.

Your pain specialist may assess you before you are discharged from hospital. You may feel drowsy if you have had any sedation, and should not drive for the rest of the day.

You should have someone to collect you from the hospital.

The following day you may return to your usual activities.

COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- A flare up of your pain, for a short time may occur.
- Bleeding or bruising at the injection site.
- Temporary drop in blood pressure.

STEROID SIDE EFFECTS

Steroids can cause some side effects. If you have diabetes, you should monitor your blood sugar carefully for about one week after your procedure because sometimes steroids can raise your blood sugars.

RARE SIDE EFFECTS

These injections are very safe but it is important that you are aware of any side effects, even if they are rare and do not occur very commonly.

- Severe headache (1 in 200), which is sometimes treated by an epidural blood patch.
- Damage nerves (1 in 10,000).
- Allergy, including severe allergic reaction.
- Numbness.
- Infection.
- Paralysis – very rare.
- Injection into a blood vessel causing a toxic reaction – very rare.

MEDICATIONS

- It is vital your pain specialist is aware of all your medications and known allergies.
- If you take blood thinning medication, such as warfarin or clopidogrel (Plavix), and these were not discussed at your outpatient appointment, please contact us before your procedure.
- Aspirin is generally ok prior to your procedure but please confirm with our team.
- Do not cease your regular pain medications; these can be taken with a small sip of water on the morning of your procedure.