What is a “Nerve or Pain Block Procedure”

Introduction:
Pain can originate in any structure of the body such as joints, soft tissues and nerves. An individual’s response to pain can differ considerably from another person, even when similar medical conditions are identified as the cause. Despite the differences in the pain experience, it is still possible to temporarily block the pain experience. The principle of a nerve or pain block is to establish that a source of pain can be identified by injecting a local anesthetic into the painful area. The injection itself may cause some discomfort initially, once the local anesthetic has taken the discomfort should subside for a period of time which may last several hours. It is during this period, when the freezing or numbing effect is active, that changes in the pain intensity and functional capabilities are assessed. In many instances such as chronic pain, the painful site and accompanying nerve pathways are sensitized so that it is not unusual for the injection to cause discomfort for a slightly longer period of time than would usually be expected.

Local Anaesthetic Effects:
At the time of your first visit or consultation, information is taken with respect to the history of the problem, findings on the physical examination and the available imaging or X-ray studies that have been performed. The type of nerve block selected will depend on what structure is causing the pain. There are a number of different local anaesthetics all of which have different lengths of time that they produce their numbing effect. With this knowledge, it is possible to sort out the characteristics of the pain causing structures and to estimate which is the most likely sites or origins of your pain. It is not always possible to find the source of pain on the first visit therefore follow-up visits may be necessary.

Side Effects:
The injection itself may cause fainting in susceptible patients. A post-injection flare-up of discomfort can occur in pain sensitized patients, 6%. The local anesthetic does not contain Adrenaline or Epinephrine. Allergic reactions are uncommon to local anaesthetics or steroid (cortisone) injections. Let us know which medications and herbal preparations you are taking. We are concerned about blood thinners (anti-coagulants), platelet inhibitors and herbal supplements since some of these can also thin your blood. We also need to know which medications you are allergic to or cause you side effects. Complications such as infection or bleeding are very rare. Nerve damage or paralysis is exceedingly rare. A prolonged nerve block with numbness along the nerve 3%, lasting up to 1 week.

Other side effects lasting less than 5 days include: Mood swings 5%, Depression 2%, Euphoria 7%, Nausea 15%, Insomnia 30%, Itching and rash 20%, Facial flushing 30%, Fever 10%, Headache 3%, Anxiety 3%, Dizziness 2%, Weakness 1%, Flu like illness 4% and elevated blood pressure 2%. Diabetics can experience a transient increase in the blood sugars, the insulin requirements may increase transiently over a 5-7 day period. Transient weight gain due to fluid retention 4%. With injections in the neck, it is possible for the local anesthetic to enter an artery and cause a brief loss of consciousness or a seizure, the incidence is very rare 1/8,000 patient treatments. Avascular necrosis (collapse) of the shoulder or hip joint is a very rare complication of corticosteroid injections.; in patients receiving 3-4 low dose steroid injections over a 1 year period the incidence probably less than 1/200,000 injections. Patients should not receive live vaccines for a 2 week period either before or after corticosteroid injections due to a transient suppression of the adrenal glands and immune system.

Monitoring the Response to Local Anesthetics:
It is important to monitor the effects of the nerve block by having you keep a diary of how the nerve block affects your usual pain intensity. A standardized diary which we have developed is an appropriate way for you to record the results of the nerve block. You will be given instructions on how to complete the diary.

Conclusion:
We would like to emphasize that the pain or nerve block is not necessarily a permanent solution to your condition and it may take several visits to find the source of pain. If there are more permanent methods in treating your condition, this will be discussed with you by the physician when the nerve block tests have been completed.

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