



Care of your arm after nerve block anaesthesia

A patient's guide

Surgery on the Upper Limb (Shoulder, Elbow, Arm, Hand)

Introduction

This leaflet is for anyone who has had upper limb surgery (shoulder, elbow, arm, hand) under nerve block anaesthesia.

The nerve block is an injection of local anaesthetic around a group of nerves (brachial plexus) to temporarily 'block' information (including pain signals) travelling along these nerves. The brachial plexus supplies **movement and feeling** to your upper limb.

After the injection, your arm would be expected to be numb, immobile and heavy (like lead) **for up to 48 hours**.

When you go home, you may not be fully aware of where your arm is. It is crucial to pay special attention to the care of your arm during this period to avoid accidental injury. You may need help with everyday tasks.

Care at home

To Do:

- Sling: Keep your arm in the sling you are given for support and protection as the numbness can last for up to 48 hours.
- Pain Relief: Start taking your pain relief medicines before the block wears off. This is important as the pain can start quite suddenly. Pins and needles can be expected as the nerve block is wearing off. It is advisable to take some pain relief before going to bed.

Medication	Maximum Dose per Day	Suggested dosage
Paracetamol	4000 mg	1000mg every 4-6 hours
Ibuprofen	2400 mg	400-800mg every 8 hours
Dihydrocodeine phosphate	240 mg	30-60mg every 6 hours

(Note: Do not take more than the Maximum Daily Dose.)

- Paracetamol, Ibuprofen and dihydrocodeine phosphate can be safely taken together.
- Please check the maximum daily dose of paracetamol if you are taking co-codamol as these contain paracetamol.

Please Avoid:

- Heat sources (e.g. fires or radiators). You will not feel heat while your arm is numb and you may burn yourself.
- Operating any machinery (including driving) or domestic appliances. Injury is more likely while you have **no sensation** in your arm.



When to seek help

Please seek help from the emergency medical services if:

- You notice unexplained breathlessness
- You experience severe pain that is not controlled by your tablets.

If the block has not fully worn off **two days AFTER** the operation you should contact the Orthopaedics on-call surgical team. They will liaise with the anaesthetic team and arrange for further follow-up if needed.

Contact Us

- **Hand Surgery Urgent queries:** Contact The Whittington Hospital Switchboard on 020 7272 3070 and request to speak to “Orthopaedics On-Call Surgical Team”
- **Hand Surgery Non-urgent queries:** Phone 020 7288 5663 or email jane.applebee@nhs.net

Further Information

-Whittington Hospital’s Patient Information on Surgery of the Upper Limb (Shoulder, Elbow, Arm, Hand): A patient’s guide – Nerve block anaesthesia for the upper limb

-Royal College of Anaesthetists about nerve blocks for surgery:

coa.ac.uk/patient-information/patient-information-resources/patient-information-leaflets-video-resources

-RA-UK, the specialist society for regional anaesthesia’s patient information video on nerve block: ra-uk.org/index.php/patient-info-video

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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