

- Rarely, nerve damage can occur as a result of the block or of the surgical procedure – this is usually temporary and may involve only a small patch of numb skin lasting weeks or months.
- The risk of more prolonged nerve damage resulting in numbness or weakness in your arm is estimated between 1 in 5,000 and 1 in 30,000 blocks.
- Reaction to the local anaesthetic – this is rare.
- Sometimes the block may not work fully and your anaesthetist may need to provide an alternative, such as some painkilling medicine through your drip, light sedation or very rarely a general anaesthetic.
- Please do not eat food for 6 hours prior to the procedure. You can have water up to 2 hours before your admission time.

Discharge advice

Your hand may remain numb for between 8 – 48 hours after the procedure and you may experience pins and needles as the block begins to wear off – this is normal. It is important that you take tablet painkillers early to keep you comfortable as the block wears off.

It is important to remember that while your arm is numb you need to take extra care to avoid injury. It is important to keep your arm in the sling provided to protect it and to reduce any swelling. Be careful not to rest your arm near a radiator or fire as you will not be able to feel the heat and could experience a burn. Do not place your arm anywhere that it might be injured, use machinery or drive. If you have any concerns about your block after you have been discharged, please contact the anaesthetic department on 01225 825056.

Lastly, if you have any questions about any part of the anaesthetic, please ask your anaesthetist when they see you before the operation.

RUH

Regional anaesthesia or 'block' for hand and arm surgery



You have been given this leaflet because you have been scheduled for hand or arm surgery under a regional anaesthetic. This is a procedure performed by an anaesthetist that makes your arm and hand go numb for your operation and for a period of time afterwards. This carries a number of benefits - read more inside.

Healthcare you can Trust

Advantages of having a block

- As you are awake during the procedure, it avoids the potential complications associated with having a general anaesthetic. This is particularly relevant if you have heart or lung conditions.
- The block will provide very good pain relief during and after the operation and allow you to return to normal functions quicker than after a general anaesthetic.
- You are far less likely to feel sick than after a general anaesthetic. This means you can eat and drink as soon as you like after the procedure is completed.
- You will be able to go home sooner after your operation than if you had had a general anaesthetic.

What does it involve?

Your anaesthetist will visit you before the procedure to discuss your anaesthetic and answer any questions you may have.

You will come into hospital on the day of your procedure. After you change into your hospital gown you will be taken to the block area where you will be made comfortable on a trolley. The anaesthetist will confirm the operation you are having again and will insert a small cannula (plastic tube) into your other hand. You will have routine monitoring equipment applied to allow your anaesthetist to ensure you are safe during the procedure.

The nerves that supply your hand and arm come from the top of your neck and run down under your collar bone into your armpit and down your arm. Your anaesthetist will perform the procedure either at the side of your neck, above your collarbone or in your armpit depending on which operation you are having. Sometimes an additional injection in the forearm will be used. The anaesthetist will use an ultrasound machine (similar to that used to look at babies in the womb) and/or a nerve stimulator to find the exact location of your nerves. The ultrasound gives an excellent picture of the nerves, and allows the anaesthetist to see exactly where they are injecting the anaesthetic solution.

Once ready, the anaesthetist will inject a small amount of local anaesthetic into the skin so that the needle used for the block does not hurt as it is inserted. The anaesthetist will then insert the needle and inject local anaesthetic solution around the nerves – this should not be painful. As they inject the solution if you get any pain or unusual sensations in your arm, remain calm but let your anaesthetist know. You may feel a pressure around the injection site as the solution is injected. Your arm may quickly feel warm and tingly and will eventually go numb after about 15-30 minutes. Sometimes an additional injection is used to ‘top-up’ the block.

Sometimes the anaesthetist will use a nerve stimulator to help find the correct position. This will make your arm twitch, but should not be uncomfortable.

Once your block is working well, you will be taken into the theatre. A screen will be put up so that you can't see any of the operation. A member of staff will be with you at all times if you have any concerns. You may listen to music if it helps you to relax – **bring in your own ipod and earphones of you wish**. During the procedure you will not feel any pain but may be aware of some movement – if at any point you have any discomfort you must let your anaesthetist know.

Potential risks of having a block

- Sometimes you may experience a hoarse voice and droopy eyelid – this will get better as the block wears off
- A sensation of difficulty breathing – occasionally, people feel that their breathing is a bit more difficult after the block, this is not dangerous, but may feel odd. This sensation will improve as the block wears off.
- There is a small risk of puncturing the lung with injections in the neck. This usually resolves without any further treatment.