OHSU Regional Anesthesia
Peripheral Nerve Block Overview

Recommended information:
To view 3 short informative videos about nerve blocks, how they are placed, and postoperative care, please search for OHSU Home Pump in your internet browser, or visit:

http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/health/services/anesthesiology/for-patients/home-pump.cfm

What does an anesthesiologist do?
An anesthesiologist is a medical doctor who keeps you safe and comfortable during surgery. An anesthesiologist will meet with you prior to surgery to make sure you are prepared and medically fit to undergo surgery and anesthesia. Your anesthesiologist will discuss a plan for what kind of anesthesia you will receive. During the surgery, your anesthesiologist will monitor and regulate your critical life functions, such as your heart rate, blood pressure, and level of oxygen in the blood. And, they take care of you after surgery to make sure you’re as comfortable as possible as you recover.

What are the types of anesthesia?
1. General anesthesia. This type of anesthesia is given as an anesthetic gas you breathe in, or as an intravenous medication given through an intravenous catheter (IV). It makes you lose consciousness. While the anesthesia is working, many of your body’s functions will slow down or need help to work effectively. A tube may be placed in your throat to help you breathe. Once your surgery is complete, your anesthesiologist will reverse the medication and be with you as you regain consciousness. It is used for major operations.
2. Monitored anesthesia care or IV sedation. IV sedation causes you to feel relaxed and can result in various levels of consciousness. The level of sedation can range from minimal sedation (you’ll feel drowsy but able to talk) to deep sedation (you won’t be fully unconscious, but you’ll sleep through the procedure and probably have little or no memory of it). Moderate or deep sedation may slow your breathing, and in some cases, you may be given oxygen. It is often used for minimally invasive procedures, such as colonoscopies. IV sedation is sometimes combined with regional anesthesia.
3. Regional anesthesia. Numbing medication is injected near a cluster of nerves to numb only the area of your body that requires surgery. This is called a nerve block. You will not be able to feel pain from the area that is numbed. A nerve block can allow surgical procedures to be done without pain. It can also be used to help with pain after your procedure. With a nerve block, you may remain awake, receive IV sedation, or receive general anesthesia in the operating room. Regional anesthesia is often used for surgeries on an extremity (arm, leg, hand, or foot).

Often, the plan of what type of anesthesia you will receive depends on your health, the type of surgery, and your preference. Regardless of what type of anesthesia you receive, there will always be an anesthesia provider with you in the operating room to make sure you are safe and comfortable.

What are the benefits of regional anesthesia?
1. Faster recovery from anesthesia
2. Better pain control than opioid (narcotic) pain medications alone
3. Decreased need for opioid pain medications, and therefore less side effects from these
medications, which include sedation, nausea, constipation, and itching
4. About 8-24 hours of pain relief after a single injection of numbing medication, also known as a **nerve block**
5. Up to 3 days of pain relief with a **nerve block catheter**, also known as a **Home Pump**
6. Easier participation in physical therapy

**What are the risks of regional anesthesia?**
Like any other medical procedure, there are risks associated with regional anesthesia. Complications or side effects can occur and can include infection, bleeding, damage to surrounding tissues including blood vessels or muscle tissue, reaction to the medication, failure of the numbing medicine to have an effect, or stopping the procedure for any reason. Long-term or permanent nerve injury after a regional nerve block is rare and may occur in approximately 2 out of every 10,000 blocks performed. To decrease many of these risks, nerve blocks are typically placed in a sterile manner using an ultrasound machine to guide placement of the nerve block. The specific risks may vary with the particular procedure and the medical condition of the patient. You should ask your anesthesiologist about any additional risks that may be associated with your particular anesthetic plan. You should feel free to talk with your anesthesiologist about your options for anesthesia, pain control after surgery, their benefits, and their possible risks.

**Does it hurt to get a nerve block?**
Getting a nerve block is typically no more painful than getting an IV. The anesthesiologist will numb your skin before placing the nerve block. Depending on your health, you may also get mild sedation through the IV prior to the procedure.

**Where can I learn more information?**
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**What if I have questions at home about the Home Pump?**
If you have questions about the home pump, call OHSU 24 hours a day at 504-494-8311 and ask for the Home Pump Physician On Call.

**What questions do I have for the anesthesiologist?**
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**Test your understanding.**
Why should I get a nerve block for my procedure on my arm?
A. Improved pain control
B. Decreased side effects from opioid pain medication
C. Faster recovery from anesthesia
D. All of the above  

Answer: D