

Going Home with a Peripheral Nerve Block
Comox Valley Hospital Department of Anesthesia 2022

The following nerve block was performed for your surgery:

Your nerve block is expected to last between _____ hrs

This is an estimation as to how long your nerve block will last. Your nerve block may wear off earlier or may last longer.

If you continue to feel the effects of the nerve block for longer than _____ hours, please call the Comox Valley Hospital Switchboard at 250.331.5900 and ask to speak to the anesthesiologist on call.

When do I start pain medications after I've had a nerve block?

Your surgeon will give you a prescription for pain medication. Start taking this medication BEFORE the nerve block first begins to wear off and BEFORE you first begin to feel discomfort. The idea is to have pain medication in your body before the nerve block wears off. It takes about 60 minutes for the oral pain medication to become fully effective.

Keep in mind that nerve blocks often wear off in the middle of the night. If you are going to bed and the numbness has not started to wear off or you have not had any discomfort, consider setting an alarm to go off in 2-3 hours so you can assess your block. If you notice the numbness is wearing off or you are starting to have discomfort you can then take your medication.

You need to take your pain medication as prescribed. Pain medications can cause sedation and decrease your breathing if you take more than you need for the level of pain you are having.

Nausea is a common side effect of many pain medications. You may want to eat something before taking your pain medicine to help prevent nausea.

What should I expect to feel after a nerve block?

Nerve blocks affect many types of nerves, including nerves that control movement, pain, and normal sensation. Nerve blocks cause feelings such as:

1. numbness
2. tingling
3. heaviness
4. weakness or inability to move your arm or leg
5. a feeling that your arm or leg has “fallen asleep”.

How do I keep my numb limb safe?

After a nerve block, you cannot feel pain or extremes in temperature in the affected limb. Because your arm or leg is numb it is at risk for injury. For example, it is possible to burn your numb arm or leg on a hot stove without knowing it. Here are some helpful tips to protect your arm or leg while it is numb:

1. While you are awake, change the position of your arm or leg often. This helps to avoid putting too much pressure on the limb for long periods of time.
2. While sleeping, pad the limb with pillows to avoid rolling onto it while you sleep. If you have had a shoulder or arm block, it is a good idea to sleep in a recliner with pillows under your arm to avoid rolling onto your numb arm as you sleep.
3. If you have a cast or tight dressing, check the color of your fingers/toes every couple of hours.
4. If you have had a shoulder, arm, or hand block, you may go home with a sling. The sling will help to keep your arm in a safe position. Wear the sling at all times until the nerve block completely wears off.
5. If you have had a leg block, you may have difficulty bearing weight on that leg. You may be sent home with crutches to use until the nerve block wears off. Have someone assist you with walking until the nerve block completely wears off.
6. Use caution in cold weather. Your numb leg or arm will not be able to feel extremes in temperature. Be sure to cover your limb appropriately before going outside in order to prevent frostbite.