



Stellate Ganglion and Lumbar Sympathetic Nerve Block

What are the sympathetic nerves? - The sympathetic nerves run on the front surface of the spinal column (not in the spinal canal with the nerves from the central nervous system). The sympathetic nerves are part of the autonomic nervous system that controls involuntary functions. In other words, the autonomic nervous system is responsible for controlling things people do not have to think about or have direct control concerning their function. However, there is a connection between the central and autonomic nervous systems. Sometimes arm or leg pain is caused by a malfunction of the autonomic system secondary to an injury.

What is a sympathetic nerve block and why is it helpful? - A sympathetic nerve block involves injecting medicine around the sympathetic nerves in a lumbar (back) or cervical (neck) area. By doing this, the system is temporarily blocked in hopes of reducing or eliminating pain. If the initial block is successful, then a series of additional blocks may be needed to diminish the pain.

General Pre-Injection Instructions – Be sure to tell your doctor if you have any allergies, particularly to contrast dye or Betadine. If not receiving sedation, patients can eat a light meal a few hours before the procedure. If you are an insulin-dependent diabetic, you must not change your normal eating pattern prior to the procedure. You may take your routine medications (i.e., high blood pressure and diabetic medications, Glucophage). However, you will need to take only half of your usual dose of insulin the day of the procedure. You should continue to take pain medications on the day of your procedure. If you are on Coumadin (blood thinner), you must notify your physician's office so the timing of the discontinuation of these medications can be explained. **A driver must accompany the patient and be responsible for getting him/her home.**

The physician will use an x-ray machine during this procedure. If you are pregnant, it is important to inform your physician.

What happens during the procedure? - An IV may or may not be started at the discretion of your physician. You are placed on a regular table on your back for a cervical (neck) block and on your belly on an x-ray table for a lumbar (low back) block. The skin on the neck or the skin on the low back is scrubbed using antibacterial soap. Next, the physician numbs a small area of skin with numbing medicine. This medicine stings for several seconds. After the numbing medicine has been given time to be effective, the physician directs a very small needle to the area of the sympathetic nerves using x-ray guidance. A small amount of contrast (dye) is injected to ensure proper needle position. Then, local anesthetic is administered to achieve the sympathetic block.

What happens after the procedure? - Immediately after the procedure, you will be asked to get off the x-ray table and report the percentage of pain relief.

The arm(s) or leg(s) may feel weak or numb for a few hours. This is quite common and happens following a sympathetic nerve block. It is only temporary. If it happens, do not worry.

No driving is allowed on the day of the procedure. You must bring someone to drive you home after the procedure.