



## Nerve Blocks for Breast Surgery

### What is a nerve block?

It is an injection of local anesthetic or freezing medicine through a needle around the nerve supply to a part of the body.

We can visualize the exact nerves of interest using ultrasound.

When the nerves are blocked, pain after surgery is well controlled reducing the need for intravenous narcotics e.g. morphine.

### Which nerve block for breast surgery?

This is known as a **paravertebral nerve block**. It is performed at the upper back on the same side as the surgery.

### Anesthesia Plan

#### General Anesthesia + Nerve Block

The paravertebral nerve block is placed before you go to sleep. General anesthesia will ensure that you are completely asleep for the operation.

## What are the benefits of nerve blocks?

Better pain control after surgery

Reduced risk of long-term pain following breast surgery (chronic post-surgical pain)

Avoidance or reduction of intravenous narcotics

Less nausea and vomiting

Earlier time to discharge home

## What to expect

### **Before Your Surgery**

You will speak with your anesthetist and together you can discuss your anesthesia plan.

You will have an opportunity to ask questions.

For safety, supplemental oxygen will be provided through your nose.

Your heart rate and blood pressure will be monitored.

### **The Nerve Block Procedure**

You will be in sitting position while the block is placed.

We will use ultrasound to find the nerves of interest.

You will feel a little sting as some local anesthetic is injected under the skin to ensure minimal discomfort.

We will spend a few minutes examining your back with ultrasound prior to inserting the nerve block needle.

When we are happy with the position of the needle we will then inject local anesthetic.

Before you go to the operating room we will confirm that the nerve block is working as planned.

Blocks usually last from 12 - 18 hours, but sometimes as long as 24 – 48 hours.

## **What Happens Next?**

You will be transferred to the operating room where you will be given a general anesthetic prior to your surgery.

## **What are the risks?**

Block failure - it may not work as well or as long as we would like

Nerve injury where the block lasts for weeks or months

Local anesthetic can leak into the bloodstream causing seizures or cardiac dysrhythmias

An accidental puncture of the lining of the lung

Infection at or deep to the injection site

## **How we minimize risk**

Doctors placing the block have undergone expert training in this technique.

We place the block while you are awake - this allows us to communicate with you, and helps us identify and treat any complications should they arise.

Ultrasound is used to target the nerves only, and it aids in avoiding the lung and blood vessels.

The use of a "sterile field" reduces the risk of infection.

During and after placement of the block, you are closely monitored by our team.

## **Contact us if you have any concerns:**

780-407-8822

Ask for Adult Acute Pain Services

## Anesthesiology and Pain Service