

## Interscalene block



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## What is an interscalene block?

Nerves leave the spine in your neck and pass into your arm. Their job is to supply power and sensations, including sensations of pain. Sometimes problems in your neck or shoulder can affect these nerves, causing sensations of pain coming from the shoulder or the arm.

An interscalene block is an injection of local anaesthetic and often a steroid around a group of nerves in your neck. This blocks the nerves and can reduce pain.

## How is the injection carried out?

The injection is performed by a Pain Consultant or suitably qualified person.

1. The site for injection will be cleaned to reduce the risk of infection.
2. You will be given some local anaesthetic around the nerves in your neck. This will be carried out using ultrasound for guidance and / or a nerve stimulator to guide the placement of the needle and ensure injection to the correct nerves. The nerve stimulator passes a small current of electricity down your arm which might make your arm/shoulder twitch. This should not be painful.

## Where will this procedure be carried out?

Either in the Pain Clinic or the Pain Clinic X-ray/treatment room.

## Are there any side effects?

Yes, there are a few, but these usually last for a short time.

- The local anaesthetic will normally last between 4 and 24 hours.
- You may have some bruising at the site of injection.
- Other side effects are – hoarse voice, droopy eyelid on the side of injection, harder to take a very deep breath in, a heavy uncontrollable arm on the side of injection.

These are temporary and should get better once the block has worn off.

- The risk of numbness or weakness due to nerve damage is:
  - lasting for 24 - 48 hours: 1 in 200.
  - lasting >6 months: 1 in 5000.

## What happens afterwards?

- You will usually be able to leave the department 30 minutes after your injection.
- You will be unable to drive until the injection wears off.
- You should have someone at home to look after you for 24 hours following the procedure, to assist with household activities.
- You will need to take care and support your arm during this time. You will not be able to feel things that might injure the numb area, such as if you fall asleep lying against something that digs in. You will be less able to use your arms to balance and protect you if you stumble or fall.

## How effective is the block?

Interscalene blocks are not always effective. This might be because the local anaesthetic doesn't spread to all the nerves. Continue with your regular prescribed pain killers unless otherwise advised.

## What should I look out for?

If numbness or weakness continues after 48 hours, please seek medical advice from either:

- the Pain Clinic on 01872 252792/ 252160 during normal working hours, or
- your GP practice.

## Will I need to come to hospital again?

Any follow up appointments will be arranged according to your individual requirements.