

Nerve blocks for wrist fractures in the emergency department Information for patients and families

Nerve blocks

A nerve block is an injection of local anaesthetic around one or more of the nerves in your arm. This 'blocks' the information that travels along these nerves. This causes the arm to become numb and immobile.

The benefits of nerve blocks

The nerve block allows your doctor to straighten your wrist and can also provide pain relief for a few hours after your procedure. It is safe and means you can avoid other methods such as sedation.

Having the nerve block

Your doctor will use an ultrasound machine to identify your nerve and to help them put the anaesthetic next to your nerve. Most people do not find the injection any more painful than having a 'drip' put in or a vaccination. When the anaesthetic starts working your arm may feel warm and heavy.

Problems with nerve blocks

Sometimes nerve blocks only provide partial pain relief. If this happens then your doctor may offer you some sedation during your procedure.

Side effects of nerve blocks

As with all injections it is possible to causing bleeding from blood vessels. Your doctor will perform simple compression if this happens. There is also a small chance of infection which is why your doctor will clean your skin first.

Nerve damage

Some patients will have a prolonged patch of altered sensation in their arm. For 95% of patients these symptoms will resolve within 4 - 6 weeks. The risk of long term damage is extremely rare.

When you go home

We recommend that you take pain relief before the block wears off. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise we recommend pain relief that you can buy from your pharmacy such as Paracetamol, Ibruprofen (Nurofen) or Panadeine.

Your arm will be put into a plaster and you will be given a sling. It is important to wear the sling because after a nerve block you will not be fully aware of the position of your arm. It is possible to injure your arm without realising when it is numb.

If your nerve block has not fully worn after 24 hours then you should return to the emergency department.

You will be referred to the Orthopaedic outpatient department for follow up. You should hear from the hospital clinic within 10 days.