

Information about Nerve Blocks for patients going for hernia surgery

If you are going for hernia surgery, you will likely receive one or several nerve blocks prior to your surgery. This will occur in the nerve block room immediately before going into the operating room. The nerve blocks will be performed by your Anesthesiologist. They help with pain during and after the surgery.

What are Nerve Blocks?

Nerve blocks are injection of local anesthetics around nerves, similar to what you receive at the dentist. The nerve blocks can make your surgery less painful and sometimes even pain free. It will help decrease the amount of pain medications including narcotics that you will need to take.

What to expect after a nerve block

Nerve blocks affect many different types of nerves, including nerves that control muscles, pain, and temperature sensation. You will not feel sharp pain but you can still feel movement and pressure during the surgery.

Nerve blocks cause feelings of:

- Numbness
- Tingling
- Heaviness
- Occasional weakness of the leg
- A feeling that a part of your body has “fallen asleep”

A nerve block can last anywhere from a few hours to over 36 hours, depending on the medications and the amount used by your Anesthesiologist. Usually, feelings of weakness wear off first. The tingling and heaviness wear off next. Finally, you may start to notice pain, although the pain may appear before the weakness and the tingling sensation wear off. Once a nerve block starts to wear off, it is usually completely gone within 60 minutes.

If you continue to feel the effects of the nerve block for longer than 48 hours, let your surgeon know and they will contact the Anesthesiologist involved.

Protection of your body

After a nerve block, you cannot feel pain or extremes in temperature putting you more at risk for injury. For example, it is possible to burn the numb part of your body without realizing it. Here are some helpful tips to help protect your body while it is numb:

Avoid putting too much pressure on it or leaning the numb part of your body against hard objects. Avoid strenuous exercise until the numbness wears off and your surgeon says it is ok to do so. Avoid putting cold or hot packs on the area of the numbness as you can injure the skin without realizing it.

If you inadvertently had weakness in your leg from the nerve block, you may have difficulty putting weight on that leg. You may be sent home with crutches to use until the nerve block wears off or you may be admitted to hospital until you are able to weight bear. Use extreme caution with stairs and do not drive until your surgeon says you can.

Pain medications

If needed, your surgeon will give you a prescription for pain medication. Start taking this medication as soon as the nerve block begins to wear off. Take pain medication before the pain becomes too severe. Keep in mind that nerve blocks can wear off in the middle of the night and they can wear off quickly.

Nausea is a common side effect of many pain medications. Eating something before taking pain medications can help prevent nausea.

Who are Anesthesiologists?

Ontario Anesthesiologists are medical doctors who have taken extra training to specialize in Anesthesia. It is important that we know about your past medical history, current medications, allergies, and ability to manage physical activity. Anesthesiologist may ask to review your medical chart, assess any laboratory results (e.g. blood work), and examine you before and after surgery. Based on this information, the Anesthesiologist develops an anesthesia plan with you and answers any questions. In addition to giving medication to “put you to sleep” called “general anesthesia”, Anesthesiologists are also experts in giving medications to put only a part of your body to sleep, which is called “regional anesthesia” and includes nerve blocks.

Anesthesiologists stay with patients in the operating room until the end of surgery. After surgery, Anesthesiologists are responsible for their patients in the recovery room until the patient is awake and stable.