

Anesthesia for Shoulder Surgery

Your doctor has recommended a regional anesthesia for your shoulder surgery. This information describes this type of anesthesia and what to expect. Carefully follow any added instructions given by your surgeon and nurse.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor or nurse.

Anesthesia Plan

Anesthesia is used to relax you and to control pain during and after your surgery. Patients who have general anesthesia may have pain, nausea, vomiting and drowsiness after their surgery. However, regional anesthesia can help avoid these effects, so that most patients:

- Recover faster and feel less drowsy
- Have excellent pain control both during and after the surgery
- Are less likely to have nausea, vomiting or a sore throat

Regional anesthesia for shoulder surgery uses:

- A nerve block which prevents you from feeling any pain during and after the surgery
- An IV (into the vein) medication (sedation) to ensure that you are sleepy and very relaxed during surgery

Keep in mind:

- Regional anesthesia cannot be used for all patients. On the day of surgery, your anesthesiologist will discuss the care option that is best for you.
- In some cases, general anesthesia may be needed. This is done only if the nerve block does not control the pain during surgery.

Procedure

The nerve block is given before your surgery starts. To begin you are given an IV medicine to relax you. The nerves of the shoulder and arm are on the side of the neck, just above the collarbone. With just one injection, these nerves are numbed and you will have no feeling in your shoulder, arm and hand for 12 to 24 hours. You will feel a gradual loss of feeling in your shoulder, arm and hand. After about 15 minutes, you will be checked to make sure that your shoulder is completely numb. The numbing affects only the side on which you are going to have surgery; the other side is not affected.

Going Home

Protect Your Arm

The numbing effect of the nerve block can last up to 24 hours. **You cannot control shoulder, arm or hand movement until the nerve block wears off.** You will not be able to tell if your arm is twisted or if anything is pushing against it. **During this time, it is important to protect your shoulder, arm and hand from injury.**

- Wear your arm sling to keep your arm in the proper position. Do this for the first 24 hours **and** for at least 3 to 6 hours after the numbing effects of the nerve block wear off.
- Protect your shoulder, arm and hand from hot and cold temperatures. Your sense of hot and cold is lessened until the numbing effect wears off.
- You may be given a cooling unit for your shoulder. The cooling unit helps relieve pain and swelling. Be sure to carefully follow the cooling unit guidelines.

Stay Comfortable

- Begin to take your pain medicine as soon as you notice the block starting to wear off. The first sign will be some feeling and movement in your hand. Take your first dose when you are able to move your fingers. Then, take the medicine on a regular basis (every _____ hours, as prescribed by your doctor) as needed.
- **Do not wait to feel severe pain.** It is much better to prevent the build up of pain than to try to stop it once it is there.
- Contact your surgeon about any severe pain not controlled by your medication.

Special Instructions

Have someone at home to help you. **Remember that you will not have use of your arm.**

You may feel some hoarseness, upper eyelid droop, nose congestion and eye redness on the side of your surgery. These effects go away as the block wears off. Let your surgeon know if these signs last longer than 24 hours after your surgery.

After surgery, the nerve block may cause some mild breathing discomfort because the nerve near the diaphragm (the muscle under the lungs) is numbed. This goes away as the nerve block wears off. If it does occur, you should rest and sleep with your head and upper body resting on 2 to 3 pillows. It may also be helpful to sit in a recliner, with your upper body elevated. Let your surgeon know if this breathing discomfort becomes worse and is not relieved by elevating your upper body.

Carefully follow the instructions given to you by your surgeon, anesthesiologist and nurse. Please feel free to ask the anesthesiologist if you have any questions about any part of your anesthesia care.

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

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