



Your anaesthetic for shoulder surgery

Information for patients



Anaesthetic technique for shoulder surgery

- ❖ Shoulder surgery in our hospital is usually carried out under general anaesthetic (*where you are in a state of unconsciousness and unawareness*) together with regional anaesthetic technique (*called Interscalene Block*).
- ❖ **Interscalene Block** means injecting a local anaesthetic drug (while you are awake or asleep) into the side of your neck around the nerve bundle supplying your shoulder and arm. This will numb your shoulder and arm and provide comfort throughout and after the procedure for up to 24 hours after your operation.
- ❖ If you choose to have general anaesthetic only you are likely to require Morphine based painkillers during and after the operation. This means that it is unlikely that you will be able to go home on the same day as your pain will be less controlled and you may have other side effects such as drowsiness, nausea and vomiting.

The Benefits of Interscalene Block (ISB):

- ❖ When successful (95%), Interscalene Block (ISB) provides excellent pain relief for up to 24 hours after your operation.
- ❖ Patients who have Interscalene block are likely to need fewer painkillers, have less sickness, recover faster and go home earlier.
- ❖ Your Anaesthetist may insert a catheter for specific indications, next to the nerves that supply your shoulder. Through this fine plastic tube a local anaesthetic will be given to provide continuous pain relief.

How is the ISB done?

- ❖ Your anaesthetist will visit you before the procedure to explain what will happen, answer any questions you have and consent you for your Anaesthetic.
- ❖ Your anaesthetist will do the block while you are asleep or awake before putting you off to sleep. In the latter case, you may be given mild sedation before the procedure to help you relax.
- ❖ An ultrasound (*scanning*) machine will be used to confirm the location of the nerve bundle supplying your shoulder on the side of your neck.

After numbing the skin with some local anaesthetic, your anaesthetist will insert a short needle which may be attached to a nerve stimulator as well (a small electric box). A small amount of electric current may cause painless twitches in your shoulder and arm.

Please inform your Anaesthetist if you experience pins and needles or any shooting pain during the procedure.

- ❖ Once the location of the nerve bundle is confirmed by US scan your anaesthetist will inject the local anaesthetic slowly. If a nerve stimulator is used, your arm twitches should stop immediately after the injection of local anaesthetic.
- ❖ When you wake up in the recovery room, you may notice that your shoulder, arm and fingers are tingly, numb and heavy but you will be pain free if the block is successful. This effect may last up to 24 hours depending on the dose of local anaesthetic used.

Are there any Side effects from ISB?

The following side effects are very common (1/10) but temporary and not serious. They only last until the local anaesthetic wears off.

- ❖ Hoarse voice, congested nose and a droopy eyelid on the side of injection.
- ❖ Occasionally a feeling of not being able to take a deep breath.

Major complications are uncommon (1/1000) or rare (1/10000) and every precaution will be taken to prevent them:

- ❖ Seizures (*fitting*) or severe drop in blood pressure and heart rate may occur due to accidental injection of the local anaesthetic into the wrong space like in a blood vessel.
- ❖ Nerve injury (*temporary or permanent*) may occur due to your Anaesthetic or surgery.

Short-term nerve damage occurs in less than 1 in 10 nerve blocks. The vast majority of those affected (92–97%) recover within four to six weeks. 99% of these people have recovered within a year. Permanent nerve damage (persistent tingling or numbness sensation in the upper limb on which you have been operated on) is rare and precise numbers are not available, it happens in between 1 in 2,000 and 1 in 5,000 patients.

- ❖ Collapsed lung, bleeding at the site of injection and infection are other rare complications.

Side effects related to General Anaesthetics

- ❖ Your anaesthetist will explain to you all the risks related to General anaesthetic such as sore throat, nausea & vomiting, dental damage and reactions to anaesthetics.
- ❖ Other specific risks will be explained on individual basis.

Who should not have ISB?

Your anaesthetist will decide if you are a suitable candidate for an ISB but generally the following patients may not be suitable:

- ❖ If you are not happy for any reason.
- ❖ Patients who are allergic to local anaesthetics.
- ❖ Patients who are taking medications that prevent blood from clotting.
- ❖ Patients with serious chronic chest diseases.
- ❖ Patients with a neck infection.
- ❖ Patient with previous injury to the nerves supplying the upper arm.

After your shoulder surgery

- ❖ You may experience pins and needles or warm/cold sensations in the arm as the block wears off. This is normal.
- ❖ Please remember to keep your arm well protected as advised by your surgeon for as long as the numbness lasts. This will prevent pressure on the arm, which could result in nerve injury.
- ❖ If you experience numbness lasting longer than 48 hours you should contact your hospital where you had the procedure. Your anaesthetist or surgeon may arrange for you to see a neurologist (a doctor specialising in nerve diseases). Special Tests may be done to try and find out exactly where and how the damage has occurred.

Pain relief after your operation:

- ❖ Your nerve block should last up to 24hrs however as this wears off you should expect to experience pain, which may be severe at times.
- ❖ We will provide you with painkillers to take home with you which we suggest you take as prescribed. Please take the first dose at the recommended time even if your shoulder still feels comfortable from the block.
- ❖ The aim is to reduce any pain to a level with which you can carry out your post-operative physiotherapy exercises in order to gain the benefit from your surgery.
- ❖ It is unrealistic to expect to be pain-free after your operation until full healing has occurred. Please also be aware that a proportion of patients undergoing surgical procedures may have persistent pain even after healing has occurred.

- ❖ It is also important to understand that all drugs have side effects. Opioids in particular commonly cause nausea, constipation and drowsiness. Opioids include drugs such as morphine, oxycodone, tramadol, codeine, dihydrocodeine, co-codamol and solpadol. Long term use of opioids are associated with tolerance, dependence and risk of addiction, and can lead to problems such as loss of libido, falls, accidents and even death.
- ❖ We will give you a short supply of strong opioids for the first few days at home as we anticipate that you will need these. However, it is not expected that these should be continued by your GP beyond the initial prescription from the hospital.

Finally, we appreciate if we could follow you up at home if we need to. Your feedback helps us to further improve and develop our service. Please let a member of staff if you have any objections against contacting you by telephone.

We wish you a smooth and rapid recovery.

Contacts

If you have any queries once you are home, or if you experience any difficulties in the 24 hours following your procedure, you should contact the Day Surgery Unit (DSU) you attended.

You can contact the DSU's between 8am – 7pm:

- ❖ Hairmyres – 01355 585630
- ❖ Monklands – 01236 712657
- ❖ Wishaw – 01698 366460

If you need advice or assistance outside these times, you should contact:

- ❖ NHS 24 – Tel: 111
- ❖ Your GP

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University Hospital Hairmyres
East Kilbride G75 8RG
Telephone 01355 585000

University Hospital Monklands
Monkscourt Avenue
Airdrie ML6 0JS
Telephone 01236 748748

University Hospital Wishaw
50 Netherton Street
Wishaw ML2 0DP
Telephone 01698 361100

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Authors:	Drs Razouk, Doody & Slorach
Clinical Lead:	

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