

### **Do I need to do anything with the pain catheter?**

If you are going to have a catheter, your anaesthetist will explain what to expect and how to manage your catheter in your preoperative consultation. It is important to be careful that the catheter is not pulled out since this may decrease its efficacy. If you notice redness, swelling or pain at the catheter insertion site, please make the ward staff or anaesthetist aware of this immediately since it may indicate the beginning of an infection.

### **What if I am still in pain?**

Occasionally, a nerve block may not take away all of your pain. If your pain is not well controlled, you will be offered alternative pain medication that your doctors have prescribed.

### **What if I do not want a nerve block?**

If you do not want to have a nerve block, you will be informed about your other choices for anaesthesia and pain relief after the operation, as well as their potential side effects.

### **What if I need more information?**

You can get more information at <https://www.sasaweb.com/>

Your anaesthetist will see you in the pre-anaesthetic consultation. He or she is a highly trained doctor whose primary functions are to ensure your safety and comfort around your operation. If you have any additional questions, you can discuss these during this consultation.

[www.sasaweb.com](https://www.sasaweb.com)



## **Peripheral Nerve Blocks for Anaesthesia**

PATIENT INFORMATION

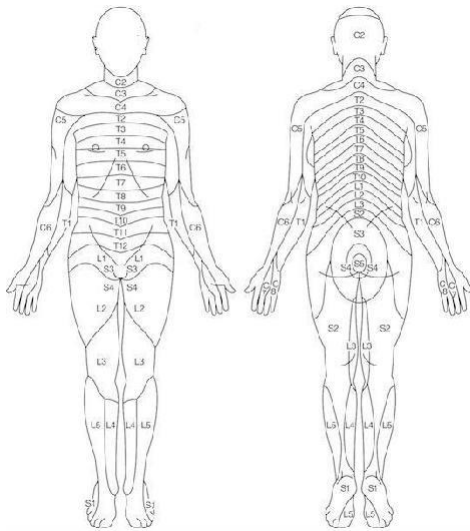
## About SASRA

The South African Society of Regional Anaesthesia (SASRA) is a member association within SASA for individual anaesthesia service providers with an interest in, and passion for, delivering quality care to their patients using specialised regional anaesthetic techniques.

It is committed to improving the academic and clinical application of these techniques for the benefits of patients. This brochure gives information on an anaesthetic technique called peripheral nerve blocks.

## Peripheral Nerve Blocks for Anaesthesia

As part of your anaesthetic management for your operation, your anaesthetist may suggest using a technique called a “nerve block”. Medication called local anaesthetic is injected around a nerve to the area of your operation, making that part of the body numb. Your anaesthetist will explain the extent of the numbness using the diagram below.



## What are the benefits of a nerve block?

Nerve blocks have many benefits including:

- Better pain relief after your surgery, especially in the first few days after surgery
- Less need for strong pain-relieving drugs such as opioids (eg: morphine)
- Fewer opioid-related side effects (e.g. nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, constipation, urinary retention and itching)
- Shorter recovery time after your surgery
- Possibly earlier hospital discharge
- Extremely safe procedure

## How will the nerve block be performed?

Your anaesthetist has been trained to perform safe and effective nerve blocks. The nerve block may be performed while you are awake, sedated or under anaesthesia. If you are awake while the block is being performed, you may feel some discomfort as the needle is introduced. Let your anaesthetist know if you have excessive pain or strange feelings shooting through the part of your body being blocked. The block may be performed using:

- nerve stimulator (your muscles will twitch slightly) and/ or
- ultrasound guidance (nerve and needle are visualised, allowing a faster, more comfortable and safer nerve block)

## What are the risks of a nerve block?

*Common complications*

- Bruising (the risk is increased if you are taking any blood thinning medication)
- Failure of block
- Persistent weakness and/ or numbness lasting longer than 24 hours (this may be related to the operation itself or positioning and usually resolves completely within a few weeks)

*Less common complications*

- Infection (risk is higher if a catheter is left in place)
- Lung collapse (with certain blocks only)
- Damage to surrounding structures such as blood vessels, nerves and muscles
- Shortness of breath (with certain blocks only)
- Numbness of the face, visual disturbance or hoarseness of the voice (with certain blocks only)
- Other block-specific complications which your anaesthetist will discuss with you

*Very Rare complications*

- Permanent nerve damage
- Overdose of local anaesthetic, which can lead to seizures or cardiac arrest (for which an antidote is available)

## After surgery

A “single shot” block can give pain relief for up to 24 hours. Sometimes a very narrow plastic tube called a “catheter” can be left in place to allow local anaesthetic to be administered continuously for a few days after surgery to assist with pain relief. Whilst your limb is numb, it is important to protect it from extreme hot or cold, pressure or awkward positions which may injure you without your knowledge. If you have weak or numb leg, only walk when there is somebody to assist you to make sure that you do not fall. If your limb is still numb after 72 hours (3 days) contact your anaesthetist or hospital.

As the block starts wearing off, you may feel pins-and-needles in the affected area. Be sure to take some pain medication before the block wears off totally to prevent the pain coming back suddenly. Your anaesthetist will discuss with you what pain medication to take.