

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PROCEDURE

LUMBAR SYMPATHETIC BLOCK

How we do the procedure

A **lumbar sympathetic block** is performed in the upper lumbar region on the side on which you have pain. It is done to block the sympathetic nerves that go to the leg on that side. Most pain specialists believe that sympathetic nerve over-activity causes the pain associated with reflex sympathetic dystrophy ("RSD", also called complex regional pain syndrome I). This block may also be performed to improve blood flow into the leg, since blocking the sympathetic nerves causes the blood vessels to fully expand or dilate.

You will be lying face down on the procedure table with a pillow under your abdomen. Your back will be cleansed with betadine and a sterile drape will cover the area. We will inject the skin with local anesthetic to make you more comfortable during the procedure. An x-ray (fluoroscopy) machine will be used to guide needle placement. Contrast or dye will be injected in order to ensure the medication flows to the proper area. We will use a small needle to inject local anesthetic solution around the sympathetic nerves at the level of the 2nd, 3rd or 4th lumbar vertebra, inserting it into the skin a short distance from the middle of the back.

What to expect

Your vital signs will be monitored, since it is possible that your blood pressure may go up or down slightly after the block. Blocking the sympathetic nerves probably will cause your leg to become dryer (decreased sweating) and warmer (increased blood flow) and should make your pain a lot better. Rarely, you may have some numbness and weakness in the leg. These effects last as long as the local anesthetic works to block the nerves, typically a few hours. The effects on sympathetic nerve over-activity hopefully will last much longer, days to weeks or more, and ideally may not come back to as bad as it was before the block. We will usually perform a diagnostic block to see if your pain gets better. If this works but only provides temporary relief, we will discuss repeated temporary blocks to see if we can **get a prolongation in response or a permanent (neurolytic or destructive) block as a long-term solution. This neurolytic block is done in the same way as the temporary one, but instead we will cauterize the nerves (radio-frequency ablation).**

Risks

The risks include bleeding, infection and a reaction to any of the medications used for the procedure. We use sterile technique to avoid infections. If you are taking a "blood thinner" (anticoagulant), we will give you special instructions before the procedure to avoid excess bleeding.

Safety Precautions

Please do not arise from lying or sitting suddenly, as your blood pressure may be affected for a few hours

by the block and this may cause you to be lightheaded.

Please be careful when walking if you have any weakness or numbness in your legs.

Since your ability to drive may be impaired for a few hours, we ask that you have someone drive you home.