Patient Information
A03

NHS Golden Jubilee

Erector Spinae Plane Block (chest nerve block)

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About this booklet

This booklet tells you about a type of nerve block that is used for pain relief following chest surgery.

What are nerve blocks?

Nerve blocks are used to reduce pain after surgery. This involves placing a local anaesthetic drug around the nerve to reduce sensitivity and pain, providing more comfort after surgery.

What is an Erector Spinae Plan (ESP) Block?

An ESP Block is an injection of local anaesthetic at the upper part of your back. This targets the nerves responsible for pain sensation in your chest.

This injection is carried out by your anaesthetist. It is normally done in the theatre reception area or in theatre before your operation.
The local anaesthetic blocks the pain signals from nerves that supply the area of your chest being operated on and can make the area feel numb.

Using this block together with other painkillers will help with pain relief after your surgery.

What happens if I get an ESP Block?

The nerve block is carried out with you sitting on the side of the bed. Our staff can help you with this. Your back will be cleaned and the skin around the injection site will be numbed with some local anaesthetic.

Your anaesthetist will then use an ultrasound machine to locate the correct area for the nerve block and then carry out the injection.

A small catheter is also placed at the time of the injection for future local anaesthetic top ups. The catheter is very thin and unlikely to cause any irritation. This is secured with an adhesive dressing.

The whole process takes around five to ten minutes. Most people find it no more painful than having a having a blood test.

What happens after my operation?

The catheter can be regularly topped up with local anaesthetic. It will remain in place for one to three days after your operation, depending on your need for pain relief. You will also receive tablet painkillers, if you need them.

What are the benefits of the ESP Block?

- Better pain relief after your operation.
- Less need for strong painkillers, which can make you feel sick or drowsy.
- Being able to take deep breaths and cough, reducing your risk of a chest infection.
- Being able to move around earlier and get home sooner.

What are the possible complications of the ESP Block?

Nerve blocks are generally very safe, however, as with most procedures in hospital, there are some risks to be aware of:

- Partial or no effect from the block – other pain relief options are available if this occurs.
- Bruising or bleeding at injection site.
- Infection at injection site.
- Damage to nearby blood vessels, nerves or lung lining (rare).
- Local anaesthetic allergy or toxicity (very rare).

Further information

If you have any questions about your ESP block, please speak to your anaesthetist. You can also contact the Acute Pain Service by calling hospital switchboard on 0141 951 5000.

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reviewed for plain English

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