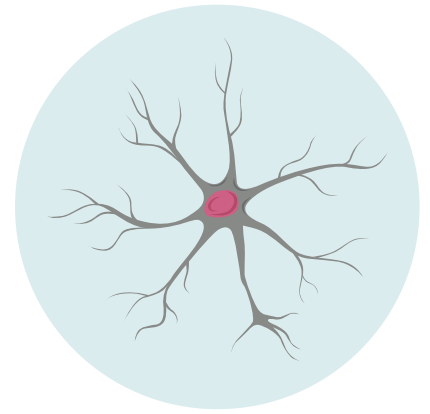




Anaesthetics – risks and side effects

Nerve damage after a peripheral nerve block

About this leaflet

This leaflet is about **nerve damage** which can happen after a **peripheral nerve block**. It explains the causes and what can be done about it.

About peripheral nerve blocks

The nervous system is used to carry signals from the brain and spinal cord to all parts of the body. Some nerves, known as **peripheral nerves**, are responsible for sensations and movement and extend all the way to the toes and fingers.

Nerve blocks are anaesthetic injections given around a nerve or a group of nerves to numb a part of the body for certain operations. For example, they are often used for operations on an arm, a hand or a leg or foot. You are normally awake during a peripheral nerve block.

Sometimes a nerve block is used to provide pain relief to help recovery from a bigger operation. In this case, the nerve block may be given during a general anaesthetic.

More information on peripheral nerve blocks can be found here:

rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/peripheral-nerve-blocks.

What does it feel like if I develop nerve damage after a nerve block?

You might feel the following sensations in the area where you had surgery:

- numbness and tingling
- muscle weakness
- aching or sharp, shooting pains
- warm or cold sensations.

You might feel more than one of these at the same time.

Nerve damage after a peripheral nerve block

Damage to the blood vessels around the nerve

The needle can damage a blood vessel near a nerve during the operation.

If a damaged blood vessel bleeds a lot, blood can collect around the area and cause pressure on the nerve. This is known as a haematoma.

Every nerve is supplied by blood vessels that keep it healthy. If the blood supply to a nerve is damaged by the needle, the nerve suffers a lack of oxygen, which can cause damage.

To prevent this from happening, often anaesthetists use an ultrasound machine to help them guide the needle in the correct place.

Very rarely, the drugs used during a peripheral nerve block can irritate the nerve or an infection may develop around the nerve after the operation.

Other causes of nerve damage after a peripheral nerve block

Not all nerve damage is caused by the anaesthetic injection or the peripheral nerve block.

To find out more about other types of nerve damage after a general anaesthetic and surgery please visit our webpage on Risks associated with general anaesthesia

(rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/risks-ga).

Nerve damage after a peripheral nerve block

This leaflet has been produced by Leila Finikarides for the RCoA, in collaboration with patients, anaesthetists and patient representatives of the RCoA.

Disclaimer

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Tell us what you think

We welcome suggestions to improve this leaflet. If you're a patient or carer, we'd love to hear from you. Please complete this short survey at: rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo/nd-after-peripheral-nb#tell-us or you can scan the QR code below with your mobile.

If you have any general comments, please email them to: patientinformation@rcoa.ac.uk.

Your feedback helps us understand who is using our information, how useful it is and how our resources have helped you. Thank you.



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