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# Local Anaesthetic Injections and Infusions

## Acute Pain Service

# Local Anaesthetic Injections and Infusions

## Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain what a local anaesthetic is, how it may feel, and the nursing care that you will receive following the injection.

Your anaesthetist may decide that the use of a **local anaesthetic injection** may be appropriate to help manage your pain after the operation.

## What is a local anaesthetic?

A local anaesthetic is a drug that can be injected or rubbed on to the skin. 'Anaesthesia' means 'the absence of sensation' so if a local anaesthetic is applied around a particular area of the body that area should feel numb and be pain free. A local anaesthetic can be used to prevent pain during an operation.

Some patients will have a plastic tube left in place following the injection so that some local anaesthetic can be trickled continuously into the operation site for a day or so following surgery.

## What does a local anaesthetic injection feel like?

When a local anaesthetic is given, usually a syringe and needle are used to inject the drug into the correct place. Initially this may

If you have any questions or concerns regarding pain relief either before or after your operation, and would like to discuss these, then please contact the Acute Pain Service.

We are available:

**Monday to Friday between 09.00 and 17.00 hours**

**Sharon Kitcatt** - Consultant Nurse Acute Pain Service

**Harriet Barker** - Specialist Nurse Acute Pain Service

**Victoria Woolger** – Specialist Nurse Acute Pain Service

telephone **01932 872000** ask for **bleep 5042**

Additional information may be obtained by logging on to [www.youranaesthetic.info/anaesthesia\\_explained](http://www.youranaesthetic.info/anaesthesia_explained) or <http://www.oyston.com/anaes/>

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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email [pals@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@asph.nhs.uk). If you still remain concerned please contact our Complaints Manager on 01932 722612 or email [complaints@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints@asph.nhs.uk)

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- You may notice that it is difficult to take a deep breath or cough properly
- Your eyelid may become droopy and the pupil in your eye becomes very small on the same side as the block
- Your voice may become hoarse

You may not experience all of these, and some people will not experience any of them. They are temporary and will wear off when the local anaesthetic wears off.

Please tell your nurse if you experience any of these symptoms. If you have any concerns, speak to your nurse or anaesthetist.

### **Are there any alternatives to local anaesthetic injections and infusions?**

This will be discussed with your anaesthetist. He/she will talk to you about alternative methods.

### **Acknowledgement**

Information from 'A Patient's Guide to Local and Regional Anaesthesia' by Dr John Oyston [john7@oyston.com](mailto:john7@oyston.com) (accessed 8 March 2007) was used in developing this leaflet

be uncomfortable until the injection takes effect and deadens the pain sensation.

The local anaesthetic will cause a loss of sensation (feeling) and the limb may feel 'tingly' and 'strange'. It may also feel warm.

Although the limb will feel different, you should still be able to move it. Due to lack of sensation, you must take care to protect the limb until the injection has worn off, (this may take several hours). If you have a continuous infusion you must protect the limb for the whole time that the infusion is attached to you.

### **What sort of operations might involve the use of a local anaesthetic injection?**

Local anaesthetic injections are often used to control pain following operations to joints such as the knee, hip and shoulder.

The anaesthetist may give a single injection which can have a numbing effect for several hours, or they may leave a plastic tube in place after the injection (as described above), so that pain relief can be given for days rather than hours.

This is called a 'continuous infusion'.

### **Why would I be given a local anaesthetic injection or a continuous infusion?**

The effect of a local anaesthetic will last for some time following surgery. This means that it will provide good pain relief which is particularly helpful if you need lots of physiotherapy.

Another benefit of a local anaesthetic is that it often reduces the amount of any other painkillers that you may need.

### **How will the nurses care for me following an injection or continuous infusion of local anaesthetic?**

Following a local anaesthetic injection, the nursing staff will check the movement of your limb, the feeling in the limb, and whether you have any pain until the injection wears off. If you have a continuous infusion, the same things will be checked for the whole of the time that the infusion is running.

In addition, the nurse will check whether you are experiencing any side effects from the local anaesthetic medicine. These include numbness around your mouth/on your face, flashing lights, the feeling of being lightheaded or dizzy. If you experience any of these symptoms please tell your nurse.

If you have a continuous infusion of local anaesthetic following an operation to your arm or shoulder, then your nurse will ask you some additional questions. These include asking you whether you have any problems swallowing or any changes in your breathing as sometimes the local anaesthetic can affect the nerves in this area. Please ask your anaesthetist or nurse if you have any queries or concerns regarding this.

### **Can I take pain-killing tablets if I have a continuous infusion of local anaesthetic?**

Yes, it is safe for you to take other painkillers. These will probably be prescribed for you to take regularly whilst you have the

continuous infusion so that you can build up an effective dose of the painkillers before stopping the infusion.

We recommend that you do take painkillers as they work in harmony with the infusion.

### **Risks and benefits of a local anaesthetic block/continuous infusion**

#### **Risks:**

- Bleeding at the site of injection
- Infection
- Development of pressure ulcers due to decreased sensation in the limb

#### **Benefits:**

- Better pain control after the operation
- Likelihood of needing less strong painkillers (e.g morphine)
- Ability to perform physiotherapy exercises without severe pain

### **Risks associated with interscalene brachial plexus blocks (used for shoulder surgery)**

The following side effects may occur if the local anaesthetic affects nerves in the area of your neck: