

SUPRASCAPULAR NERVE BLOCK FACT SHEET



Peter Mac
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Victoria Australia

DEPARTMENT OF ACUTE & PERSISTENT PAIN

This fact sheet aims to answer some general questions about the suprascapular nerve block. Please read the following information carefully. If you need further information, please ask your doctor or pain nurse.

What Is the Suprascapular Nerve?

The suprascapular nerve is located at the shoulder blade. It directs the movement and sensation of the shoulder joint and rotator cuff muscles.

What Is a Suprascapular Nerve Block?

A suprascapular nerve block is an interventional procedure consisting of an injection that targets the suprascapular nerve to interrupt its ability to send pain messages to the brain.

Why Perform a Suprascapular Nerve Block?

For various reasons, the suprascapular nerve may become injured or compressed, which results in shoulder pain. Some common conditions in which the suprascapular nerve may be affected include breast cancer and Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome.

Patients can require strong medication, such as opioids, and other medications

that target nerve pain, in order to control this pain. However, these medications can also cause unwanted side effects like drowsiness, fatigue and constipation.

A suprascapular nerve block can help to target the specific shoulder pain. It is important to remember that the injection usually does not stop all pain, but it may lessen the need to use pain medication.

Most patients feel some, although not total, relief from pain after the procedure. The benefit of the suprascapular nerve block varies from patient to patient, but it may last up to several months. A repeat suprascapular nerve block can be considered.

What Happens Before and After the Procedure?

It is recommended that blood-thinning products be stopped prior to the procedure. You will be advised on the recommendation for your specific circumstances when we confirm your procedure. You will be able to continue

taking all your other medications with a sip of water on the day of your procedure.

Please refer to the *Interventional Procedure Pre-Admission Fact Sheet* for further, detailed information.

What Happens During the Procedure?

A suprascapular nerve block is performed under imaging guidance in the operating theatre or radiology department. The whole procedure usually takes 30 - 60 minutes. You may be sedated prior to the procedure.

Local anaesthetic will be injected under your skin to numb the discomfort of the block needle. A different local anaesthetic will then be injected to the suprascapular nerve to numb the nerves. Often, the local anaesthetic solution will also contain a steroid. The steroid acts to reduce any inflammation or swelling around the nerves.

What Are Possible Side Effects?

Any invasive interventions, including a suprascapular nerve block, may cause complications that can be serious. By performing the procedure under imaging guidance and sterile conditions, we aim to minimise the risk of serious complications.

Common side effects include:

- Pain, tenderness, swelling or bruising around the injection
- Weakness, numbness, heavy sensation in affected limb

Less common, but also possible complications:

- Infection (around the injection site internally or externally)
- Bleeding (around the injection site internally or externally)
- Allergic reaction to the dye or medicines injected
- Surrounding nerve or spinal block
- Injury to surrounding nerves
- Injury to surrounding organs
- Local anaesthetic toxicity
- Failure of injection