

Nerve Block for Shoulder Surgery: What You Need to Know

As part of your anesthetic care for shoulder surgery, your anesthesiologist may offer you a **nerve block** to help manage pain after your procedure. You will still receive a **general anesthetic** for the surgery itself.

What Is a Nerve Block?

A **nerve block** involves injecting a local anesthetic (a "freezing" medication) near a group of nerves in your neck called the **brachial plexus**. These nerves control sensation in your shoulder and arm. The block is performed either **before or after surgery** by your anesthesiologist using:

- An **ultrasound machine** to see the nerves clearly,
- **Specialized needles** to precisely deliver the anesthetic,
- Techniques specifically designed to **reduce the risk of nerve damage**.

Benefits of a Nerve Block

The brachial plexus block is a **highly effective method for controlling pain** after shoulder surgery. It can:

- Provide **12 to 24 hours of significant pain relief**, and
- **Reduce the need for strong pain medications** during that time.

However, once the block begins to wear off, pain may return. That's why it's essential to have other pain medications available and start taking them **before the numbness wears off**.

Post-Surgery Pain Management

To ensure your comfort, your anesthesiologist and surgeon will prescribe:

- **Scheduled medications** like acetaminophen and anti-inflammatories,
- **Stronger prescription medications** for breakthrough pain as the block wears off.

It's important to **start these medications early**, as the freezing effect fades, to prevent sudden severe pain.

Are There Risks?

Nerve blocks are generally very safe, and multiple precautions are in place to minimize risk. However, as with any medical procedure involving needles, there are **potential risks**, including:

- Bleeding,
- Infection,
- **Nerve injury** (rare),
- **Collapsed lung** (*pneumothorax*, very rare).

Your anesthesiologist will take all necessary steps to avoid these complications.

Questions or Concerns?

You'll have the opportunity to speak with an anesthesiologist either during a **preoperative appointment** or on the **day of surgery**. They'll be happy to answer any questions you may have about the nerve block or any other aspect of your anesthesia care.