

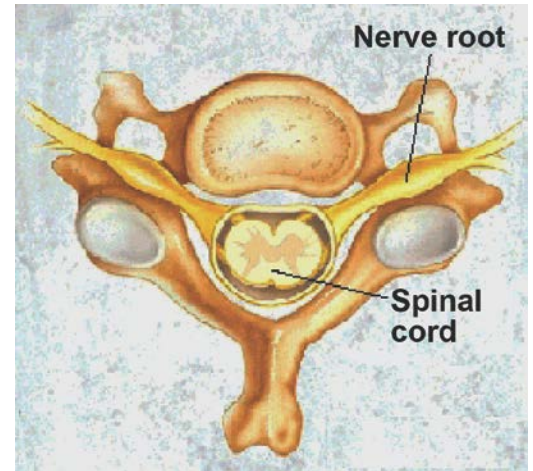
# Cervical Transforaminal Nerve Block Injection

*Benefits, risks, what to expect, and how to prepare*

*This handout explains a cervical nerve block injection. It includes benefits, risks, what to expect, and how to prepare.*

## What is a cervical transforaminal nerve block injection?

In a *cervical transforaminal nerve block injection*, medicine is injected near a *spinal cord nerve root*. A spinal nerve root is where a spinal nerve branches off from the spinal cord between the *vertebra* (the small bones that form the backbone).



*This cross-section of the spine shows the spinal cord and a nerve root.*

This injection may be used to:

- **Diagnose pain:** Injecting a local *anesthetic* (numbing medicine) can tell your provider if a specific spinal nerve is causing your pain.
- **Treat pain:** Injecting a *corticosteroid* medicine (“steroid”) near the nerve root can help reduce pain as part of your pain control plan.

## What are the benefits of the injection?

- The local anesthetic may give you pain relief right away. This helps your provider know what is causing your pain. The short-term pain relief can last for several hours.
- Pain relief from steroids occurs more slowly than with a local anesthetic, since steroids work over time by decreasing inflammation. If steroids are injected, it may take a few days or more than a week before you feel their effects.

## What are the risks?

Cervical nerve block injections have been linked with:

- Stroke, seizure, and other serious health problems

- Infection
- *Spinal headaches* (head pain caused by leaking of the *cerebrospinal fluid* that surrounds the brain and spinal cord)
- Bleeding or fluid leakage in the spinal cord
- Nerve damage
- Ongoing increase in pain

### **Contrast Reaction**

*Contrast* (X-ray dye) may also be injected as a part of this procedure. Contrast helps images show more clearly on X-rays.

If you have ever had an allergic reaction to contrast:

- You are at risk for having another reaction.
- Tell your provider about your contrast allergy **before** your procedure.

### **What can I expect?**

- You will lie on your back, stomach, or side on an exam table.
- You need to be able to talk and answer questions during the procedure. This means we cannot give you sedation that will make you sleep.

When you are ready, your doctor will:

- Use local anesthetic to numb your skin where the needle will be inserted.
- Use X-ray to guide the needle to the right place.
- Inject contrast into the area, if it is a part of your procedure.
- Give you the nerve block injection.

To make sure the nerve block injection is being done in the right place, your doctor will ask you questions from time to time during the procedure.

### **Does the injection hurt?**

- The local anesthetic will numb your skin so you will not feel the needle when it enters your skin.
- When the needle gets close to the spinal nerve, you may feel some discomfort, tingling, or a deep ache. Tell your doctor if this happens.

### **How long does the procedure take?**

Plan to spend 2 hours at the clinic, from the time you are admitted until you can leave. The nerve block injection itself takes about 15 minutes.

## How do I prepare?

- **You will need to stop taking all blood-thinning (*anticoagulant*) medicines some time in the week before your nerve block.** If you are taking any of the medicines listed below, talk with your prescribing doctor as soon as you schedule your block to find out when to stop your blood-thinning medicine:
    - Coumadin (warfarin), Edoxaban (savaysa), Effient (prasugrel), Eliquis (apixaban), Plavix (clopidogrel), Lovenox (enoxaparin), Pletal (cilostazol), Pradaxa (dabigatran), Teclid (ticlopidine), Xarelto (rivaroxaban)
- Please call the pain clinic if you have not been able to talk to your doctor about stopping your blood-thinning medicine 1 week before the injection. We will need to reschedule your injection for a later date.
- If you take aspirin or anti-inflammatory medicines, talk to your doctor about changing your doses before your nerve block injection.

## Morning of the Injection

- **Starting 6 hours before your injection:** Do not eat any solid foods. You may drink clear liquids.
- **Starting 2 hours before your injection:** Do not take anything by mouth.
- Plan to arrive at least 45 minutes before your appointment.
- Be prepared to spend at least 2 hours at the clinic.
- Arrange for a responsible adult to take you home.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.

## After Your Injection

- Even if you do not have sedation, we advise you not to drive or use machinery for 24 hours after your injection.
- We may send you home with instructions to keep a pain diary. Please follow the instructions closely.
- Be sure you have follow-up visits set up as needed with your pain provider, primary care provider, or both.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your pain clinic if you have questions or concerns.

- Harborview Pain Clinic: 206.744.7065
- UWMC Center for Pain Relief: 206.598.4282