

Stellate Ganglion Block

A nerve block relieves pain by blocking the pain signal sent to your brain. Some nerve blocks are used to find out sources of pain. Others are used to treat painful conditions. A stellate ganglion block is an injection of medication, local anesthetic and steroid, given to block a plexus of nerves located on either side of the voice box.

Conditions treated

You might benefit from a stellate ganglion block if you suffer from:

- Complex regional pain syndrome/reflex sympathetic dystrophy
- Neuropathic pain
- Sympathetically maintained pain

Duration

30 minutes

How is it performed?

This block is performed using fluoroscopy (x-ray). You will lie on your back on the x-ray table. The area to be treated is identified using the x-ray and pressure on the neck. The skin above this area is made numb using a local anesthetic. Needle placement is confirmed by injecting dye. After appropriate spread is confirmed a solution of local anesthetic and cortisone is injected to block the plexus.

Prior to your appointment

You should continue taking all medications except blood thinners before the procedure. Please see your medication handout to know when to hold and resume these medications or ask your doctor.

What are some of the risks and side effects?

This procedure is a relatively safe, non-surgical treatment, with minimal risks of complications. Some of the most common or possible side effects are:

- As with any of these types of procedures, there is a risk of infection or bleeding. Rarely, nerve damage can occur.
- Short-term side effects of numbness, weakness and increased pain may occur. It is common to have discomfort at the needle puncture site.
- A rare risk of injection into blood vessels or surrounding organs can occur.
- During the procedure, your blood pressure may drop. You may need to be given fluids, and sometimes medications, to help with this.
- After the procedure, you may have hoarseness and difficulty swallowing. Should these occur, they typically resolve within 9 hours. Do not eat or drink until you can swallow normally.

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What to expect after the procedure

You may feel slightly weak or odd for a few hours after the injection. You may notice a slight increase in temperature in the affected arm. Also, your pain could increase slightly after the procedure and could last for several days, until the cortisone becomes effective.

You may begin to notice an improvement in your pain two to five days after the injection. If you do not notice improvement within 10 days after the injection, it is unlikely to occur.

You may take your regular medications after the procedure.

You may be referred for physical therapy while the numbing medicine is effective and/or over the several weeks while the cortisone is working.

