

Intercostal Nerve Block

An intercostal nerve block is an injection of corticosteroid and local anesthetic medication given to block the nerves located under the ribs. This block can be used for pain in the upper back, flank, or chest wall.

Conditions treated

You may benefit from an intercostal nerve block if you suffer from:

- **Rib fracture**
- **Intercostal neuralgia**
- **Post-thoracotomy pain**

Duration

Less than 30 minutes

How is it performed?

This procedure is performed using fluoroscopic x-ray. For the procedure, you will lie on your stomach on the x-ray table. Local anesthetic will be used to numb the skin overlying the injection area. A dye will be injected to help identify the area to be treated. Once identified, the medication will be injected. If neurolysis is being performed, radio-frequency ablation or dehydrated alcohol will be used.

Prior to your appointment

You may continue taking all medications except blood thinners before the procedure.

Please see your medication handout to determine when to hold and resume blood thinners or ask your doctor.

What are some of the risks and side effects?

As with procedures of this type, 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 feel discomfort at the needle puncture site.

A rare risk of lung collapse is possible due to the closeness of the needle to the lung. If you develop any shortness of breath after the procedure, you should go to an emergency room to get a chest x-ray and call your pain physician.

Steroids will cause elevated blood sugar and can increase your blood pressure. You may also develop temporary flushing, muscle cramping, increased appetite and difficulty sleeping. This will typically resolve in 1 week but can last several weeks.

What to expect after the procedure

You may feel a weak or numb sensation where the medication was injected. As the numbing medication wears off, you may experience an increase in pain. Once the steroid begins to work, you should experience pain relief in 3-5 days.

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Ice is typically more helpful than heat during the first few days after the injection. You should not drive or engage in physical activity for 24 hours following the procedure. You may resume medications and regular eating habits immediately.

