Lumbar Sympathetic Block

Pain Management Services
Lumbar Sympathetic Block

What is Lumbar Sympathetic block?

The lumbar sympathetic nerves control blood flow to the skin and muscles of the leg, sweating, and some pain response in the leg. They do not control skin sensation or muscle power in the leg.

In some pain conditions the sympathetic nerves appear to become hypersensitive and contribute to causing persistent pain. There is a variable association with other symptoms including change of temperature in the leg or foot, colour change, sweating change, hair or nail growth change, skin sensitivity, and swelling. These symptoms may be part of a picture of complex regional pain syndrome although the sympathetic nervous system may contribute to pain in other pain syndromes.

Lumbar Sympathetic Block is an injection procedure to reduce activity in the lumbar sympathetic nerves.

What is the aim of treatment?

The aim of treatment is to temporarily reduce activity in the lumbar sympathetic nerves. This is intended to break the cycle of continuous pain and to allow increased normal use of the leg and rehabilitation.
Before the procedure

To be sure your general health is suitable to allow you to have this procedure you will first be assessed by the healthcare team. You will be asked to read the information leaflet and to decide whether you wish to consent to having the procedure performed. You may wish to discuss this with your family.

You may drink clear fluids 2 hours prior to treatment, but you should not eat for 6 hours. If you are diabetic this may affect your need for insulin or tablets and your healthcare team will monitor your blood sugar and your requirement for insulin or tablets, involving the specialist diabetic team if necessary.

Normal medication should be taken prior to the procedure with the exception of medication to thin the blood or to inhibit blood clotting. Please tell your doctor if you take any substance of this nature. Your healthcare team will ensure that these are stopped at the appropriate time.

How is the procedure performed?

Your treatment will be performed in the operating theatre. The skin on your back will be marked with an arrow to ensure the procedure is carried out on the correct side. Further preoperative checks will be made on arrival and again in theatre just before the procedure begins.

You will be asked to lie on your front for about 45 minutes and will be given sedation to reduce awareness. X-ray is used to guide the doctor in positioning the needle. This ensures the drugs
given spread to the correct areas. The drugs injected are local anaesthetic and a long lasting steroid.

After the procedure, you will be asked to lie on your side with the treated side uppermost for half an hour after which you will be moved to the recovery ward for initial monitoring. If you experience pain you will be given medication to relieve this. When you have woken up from the sedative, you will be taken back to your ward, where you may eat and drink.

This procedure is usually done for out patients as a daycase and you will be allowed home after a period of observation on the Day Surgery Ward. You should arrange for a responsible adult to accompany you home and stay with you overnight after the treatment. Rarely you may be asked to stay in hospital overnight for observation.

**What is the potential benefit?**

Pain and sensitivity may be reduced allowing improved mobility and rehabilitation.

**What are the potential risks?**

1. You may feel a little bruised at the injection site - this is temporary and will be relieved by simple pain killers.
2. There may be a drop in your blood pressure - this is usually small and is treated by fluids given into a vein.
3. Procedures may cause an initial increase in pain but this is usually self-limiting.
4. About 1% of people develop groin pain due to neuralgia. This normally settles within 3 months, but may require pain killers.

5. Bleeding may occur.

6. Infection may, rarely, develop but every care is taken to avoid this by carrying out the procedure under sterile conditions in theatre.

7. Failure or only partial success may occur.

8. Rarely nerve injury may occur.

**Is there any alternative to this injection?**

This injection will form only one part of a management plan to reduce pain and sensitivity in complex regional pain syndrome and to enable re-habilitation. Multidisciplinary treatment is central to management.

A combination of medications which reduce inflammation, pain on movement, and nerve sensitivity is generally recommended.

Physiotherapy and a regular programme of home-based exercise is started. Other therapists, inclusive of an occupational therapist and a clinical psychologist, are often involved.

**TENS** therapy is often beneficial as are other forms of nerve stimulation.

The lumbar sympathetic block injection may be a useful adjunct to these other treatments; although without this other treatments may still be effective.
There is, however, no direct alternative, i.e. no other injection which does exactly the same thing.

WHAT If I have any FURTHER questions?

Before treatment
You should ask your doctor before signing the consent form.

After treatment (on Day Ward)
Ask a member of staff, they will answer your questions or will contact your doctor.

After treatment (at home)
The Pain Clinic runs an advice line answerphone service for non-emergency queries. Please call 01932 723998 - calls will be returned the following Tuesday.

Urgent calls
After day surgery should be directed to St. Peter’s Hospital Accident and Emergency – telephone 01932 722321, or to your own doctor.

Additional Information

The Pain Society provides a comprehensive web site that you may find useful at www.britishpainsociety.org
Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email pals@asph.nhs.uk. If you remain concerned, PALS can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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We can provide interpreters for a variety of languages, information in larger print or other formats (e.g. audio) - please call us on 01932 723553.

To use the Text Relay service, prefix all numbers with 18001.