

Cardiff Spinal Clinic

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Selective Nerve Root Block

Nerve root pain results from irritation of the nerve either from a disc prolapse or bony spur. This can present as arm pain or pain into the leg, ie sciatica.

Nerve root blocks are carried out as out-patient procedures under x-ray guidance. They can be used both as a diagnostic injection in order to confirm where the pain is coming from but also as a therapeutic injection to avoid the need for surgery.

Under x-ray guidance a needle is placed close to the nerve and local anaesthetic and steroid injected around the nerve to decrease the inflammation around the nerve and to decrease the pain from that nerve.

Before the procedure: it is usually done as an out-patient treatment under local anaesthetic, although sometimes sedation can be used. If you take blood thinning medication, please let my secretary know as I will need to know as well as the radiologist if it is done by them. We will need to work out, depending on which medication you take, with regards to how many days it needs to be stopped before the injection can be performed

During the procedure: you would be laying on your front in x-ray or the ambulatory care unit. The skin area will be cleaned and local anaesthetic injected into the skin. Using fluoroscopy (real time x-ray) the needle will be directed down towards the nerve and once the needle position is adequate then a radiographic dye will be inserted to confirm needle placement and then local anaesthetic and steroid will injected. The procedure can take between five to twenty minutes.

After the procedure: if it is done in x-ray then you are allowed to leave when you feel comfortable. You will require someone to take you home as you will not be able to drive yourself. It is common to experience pain in the area and numbness into the leg or arm as the local anaesthetic effect can cause this. The local anaesthetic effect usually will have worn off within twelve to twenty-four hours. The steroid is not effective during the first twenty-four hours.

For the first week you can continue with work but with regards to exercise, this should be restricted for the first five to seven days.

It is common to have an appointment four weeks after the injection to see how well it has worked. You will need to make this appointment with the hospital.

The risks to this procedure include infection, haematoma, nerve injury, leakage of spinal fluid. These risks are well below 1%.