

Lumbar Sympathetic Injection

What is a lumbar sympathetic injection?

A sympathetic block is an interventional procedure that is designed to relieve pain in the lower extremities by injecting local anesthetics around the sympathetic nerves in the lower back. This pain may be caused by an imbalance in the sympathetic nervous system (sometimes called Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy or Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome) but can also be used for other causes of pain such as post-herpetic neuralgia, circulatory insufficiency and phantom limb pain.

With fluoroscopic guidance, needles are advanced along the side of the lumbar spine. Needle tip placement is confirmed by injection of contrast (dye) to verify proper needle location. After correct needle position is confirmed by x-ray (fluoroscopy) the proper medications are injected. The most common medications injected are Lidocaine and Marcaine.

How does a lumbar sympathetic block relieve my pain?

The sympathetic nerves run on the front side of the spinal column (not in the spinal canal with the nerves from the central nervous system). The sympathetic nerves are part of the autonomic nervous system, which is responsible for controlling things people do not have to think about or have direct control over. An imbalance in the sympathetic nervous system can be responsible for chronic pain in the lower extremities. A lumbar sympathetic block uses local anesthetics that “turn off” the sympathetic nerves and sometimes can allow them to function normally.

What can I expect during the procedure?

After checking in at the Surgery Center, you will be interviewed by the admission nurse who will take a full history, then start an IV. You will also be seen by the medical staff of the Arizona Pain Clinic prior to the procedure, at which time you will have the opportunity to ask any additional questions.

After being placed on the treatment table, intravenous sedation will be administered to make the procedure as comfortable as possible. The injection usually takes only several minutes. Following the procedure, you will be allowed to rest for approximately 30 minutes in the recovery area prior to discharge. You must have a responsible adult take you home.

When will I begin to feel pain relief and how long will it last?

If a lumbar sympathetic block is going to be effective, the patient usually feels some relief of their symptoms with several hours of the injection. The length of pain reduction depends on multiple factors including the severity of the problem, how long it's been present and the overall health of the patient.

What is the anticipated recovery from the procedure?

Recovery from the procedure is short. You may have minor discomfort at the injection site, which usually resolves within 24 hours. If you continue to have symptoms, please refer to Surgery Center discharge instructions. You also may call the Arizona Pain Clinic if there are any concerns.



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