

# Patient Information: Interscalene Block

**An Interscalene Block (ISB) is a nerve block in the neck used to:**

1. Provide a heavy numbness in the shoulder and arm (in the same way that a dentist can numb a tooth) so that shoulder surgery can be carried out under a light general anesthetic.
2. To provide excellent pain relief for shoulder carried out under general anesthesia.

**The BENEFITS of an interscalene nerve block (ISB) for shoulder surger are:**

- Reduced risk of nausea and vomiting and sedation
- Earlier to leave surgery center
- Early intake of food and drink
- Excellent pain control
- Lighter general anesthetic with speedier recovery from the anesthetic
- Less chance of an overnight stay at the hospital

**Pain Control:**

- The nerve block technique used is a single injection that lasts 12 to 36 hours.
- After leaving the surgery center, it is extremely important that you take regular pain killers at the prescribed times from the moment the block begins to wear off. This is to avoid unpleasant pain at the time when the nerve block wears off (which can be in the middle of the night, so you may want to take prescribed pain meds before going to bed).

**Managment of the “Numb Arm”:**

You should carry the “numb” arm in an arm sling until normal sensation and motor function return and/or until your physician instructs you to stop wearing the immobilizer. You should take caution to not come in contact with extremely hot or cold items because you will not be able to protect yourself from injuries of extreme temperature.



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## Side effects of ISB:

Most of the side effects are related to the local anesthetic spreading and numbing the nerves adjacent to the ones that supply the shoulder and arm. Any or all of the following can occur, but all resolve spontaneously as the effects of the local anesthetic wear off.

- Shortness of breath - The injection in the neck can also numb half of the diaphragm (a muscle used in breathing). Some people can feel slightly short of breath, although in most this does not affect greatly the ability to breath adequately.
- Blurred vision (Horner's syndrome) - 20%. This is seen as a drooping eyelid and slightly blurred vision on the side of the block and it is usually not a problem.
- Symptoms pass as the block wears off.
- Hoarsness - 15%. Due to the nerves supplying the voice box being numbed. This improves as the local anesthetic wears off.
- Difficulty swallowing water - 15%. Due to nerves supplying the voice box and throat being numbed. This effect can usually be overcome by "conscious" swallowing and usually it is not a problem.



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