



Information for adult patients undergoing **Lumbar Sympathetic Block (Lumbar Sympathectomy) for the Treatment of Pain**

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information about lumbar sympathetic blocks and to answer some questions that you may have. Please note that places may do things differently. Your doctor will be able to explain fully what to expect.

What is a lumbar sympathetic block?

A lumbar sympathetic block is an injection around nerves that supply your feet, legs and pelvic area. The injection is done close to your spine in the lumbar region. A lumbar sympathetic block will block nerves known as sympathetic nerves to try to improve your pain. The injection may be given alongside other treatments such as physiotherapy. This leaflet refers to injections of local anaesthetic, however other agents may be used. Your doctor will give you further information if this is the case.

Is this the right treatment for me?

Other treatment options will be discussed with you before deciding to have the injection and your consent is needed. The decision on whether or not to have the injection is made together by you and your doctor. Your doctor will be able to give you up-to-date information about the chance of this treatment working for you. If you are undecided about whether or not to have an injection then more advice and information can be given.

Please speak to your doctor for more information.

Lumbar Sympathetic Block for the Treatment of Pain

If your health has changed, it is important to let your doctor know.

- ▶ If you have an infection in your body or on the skin of your back, your doctor may wait until the infection is cleared before giving the treatment.
- ▶ If you have been started on anticoagulant or antiplatelet medicines that “thin the blood” such as warfarin, heparin, apixaban, rivaroxaban or clopidogrel, extra preparation may be needed before you have the treatment.
- ▶ If you have any allergies.

You must also tell the doctor if there is any chance that you could be pregnant.

Finally, if you are planning to travel abroad or fly within two weeks after the injection, please let your doctor know as it may be best to change the date of the injection.

What will happen to me during the treatment?

Before the injection, your doctor will discuss the procedure with you. Your doctor will either ask for your consent before the injection or ask you to confirm that you have already given consent and are still happy to have the injection. The treatment will take place in a dedicated area with a trained person. An X-ray machine, ultrasound, (or other forms of image guidance) will be used to make sure the injection is accurate. Not all doctors give these injections in exactly the same way but this is what usually happens:

- ▶ A medical professional will get you ready for the procedure. Your blood pressure and pulse rate may be checked.
- ▶ A small needle (cannula) will be placed in the back of your hand.
- ▶ You will be carefully positioned and the skin around the injection site(s) will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution or spray; this can feel very cold.
- ▶ X-ray, ultrasound, or alternative ways will be used to make sure the needle is in the right position.
- ▶ You will feel a stinging sensation as local anaesthetic is injected to numb the skin and surrounding tissues. Your doctor will warn you of this first.
- ▶ The doctor will direct the needle to the correct position alongside your lumbar spine. Contrast (solution which shows up under X-ray) is injected to make sure the needle is in the correct position. When the injections are made, you may feel pressure, tightness or a pushing sensation. If it is uncomfortable, do let the doctor know.

What will happen to me after my injections?

After the injection you will be taken to a recovery or ward area where nursing staff will check on you. Sometimes you will be asked to lie flat for about 30 minutes or longer. You may be helped to sit up and your blood pressure and pulse will be checked. You will be told when to get dressed and be given help to make sure that you can stand safely after the procedure.

Lumbar Sympathetic Block for the Treatment of Pain

Your pain will be checked at rest and during activities of daily living such as walking to find out how much pain relief you have following the injection.

When will I be able to go home from hospital after my injections?

You will usually be able to go home within a few hours after the injection and in some cases much sooner, depending on how long your doctor or nurse want you to stay. Please make sure that you have someone to collect you after the procedure. It is unsafe for you to drive home straight after the procedure. If you do so your motor insurance will be invalid.

What can I do after my procedure?

Ideally, you should arrange for someone to stay with you for 24 hours but, if you can't, you should at least have access to a telephone. You should not drive, operate machinery, sign legal documents, provide childcare without help or drink alcohol until fit to do so.

If you are not sure, please ask your doctor for more advice.

When can I return to work after the procedure?

This will be different for different people and may depend on the type of work you do. It is difficult to give general advice and so you should discuss this with your doctor.

Will I experience any side-effects?

As with any procedure, there may be side effects. However, these are usually minor and there is little risk of serious harm.

Side-effects may include:

- ▶ Mild local tenderness and / or bruising at the site of the injection. This usually gets better over the first few days, but sometimes people experience back pain for longer.
- ▶ Blood pressure may be low after a lumbar sympathetic block. The nurse will check regularly before you go home. You will be checked when you first stand up and walk after the procedure.
- ▶ Sometimes longer lasting pain is experienced in the genital area or on the inside of your leg. This is usually temporary.
- ▶ The local anaesthetic may spread causing some numbness and/or weakness in your legs and other areas. If this happens, the effect is temporary and will quickly get better over minutes or hours.
- ▶ Infection. This is rare. You should seek medical help if there is local warmth or redness where you had the injection with tenderness. Or if you feel hot and unwell. This may need antibiotic treatment.
- ▶ Intravascular injection. Very rarely, inadvertent injection of local anaesthetic may lead to collapse and require medical treatment.
- ▶ Rarely, sexual dysfunction can happen and this is usually in cases where both sides of the body are injected.

Lumbar Sympathetic Block for the Treatment of Pain

- ▶ Internal organ puncture and damage.
- ▶ Bleeding from major blood vessel puncture.
- ▶ Injection treatments do not always work and may not help your pain.



People vary in how they interpret words and numbers.
This scale is provided to help.



What can I expect in the days afterwards?

You may feel some soreness or aching at the injection site. Please keep the area of the injection dry for 24 hours following the procedure. Do not worry if your pain feels worse for a few days as this sometimes happens. Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal and this should get better. Try to keep on the move about the house while avoiding anything too difficult.

What should I do in the weeks after the injections?

As your pain decreases, you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming on your back will help to improve your muscle tone. Your doctor will be able to give you more specific advice. It is best to increase your activities slowly. Try not to do too much as you may end up with more pain the next day.

What follow-up will be arranged?

A letter will usually be sent to your GP and your doctor will advise on what to do after the procedure. You may be asked to make a call to the pain department, be given a form to fill in, or given a telephone review or other appointment.

Lumbar Sympathetic Block for the Treatment of Pain

Is there anything else I need to think about before the procedure?

- ▶ Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading.
- ▶ Bring any other devices you may need, such as hearing aids, mobility aids etc.
- ▶ Always bring a list of all current medication.
- ▶ Continue to take your medication as usual on the treatment day.
- ▶ Avoid vaccinations including COVID-19 jabs for 2 weeks on either side of the procedure

Finally...

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's or health care team's advice. If you need more information or have any questions or concerns please speak to your GP or contact your Pain Clinic.

Name	
Pain Service	
Address	
Contact Numbers	

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Acknowledgements:

Members of the Professional Standards Committee.