



Intercostal Nerve Block Patient Education

Southern Coast Specialists offers a variety of minimally invasive pain treatment procedures that we have perfected to help you achieve pain relief. Our treatments have been proven effective and are on the cutting edge of science related to pain reduction. Our goal is to improve every patient's overall function and thus restore a better quality of life.

What is an Intercostal Nerve Block?

An intercostal nerve block is an injection of local anesthetic, with or without steroids, just under the rib where the intercostal nerve lies. An intercostal nerve block is typically ordered by your doctor for pain in your rib area that develops following surgery in that area, a rib fracture, herpes zoster (shingles) or an intercostal nerve entrapment or inflammatory condition.

An Intercostal Nerve Block may have diagnostic or therapeutic value. One of three things will happen:

- The Nerve pain does not go away, which means that the pain is probably not coming from the nerve(s) at the level(s) of the injection. This result has diagnostic value.
- The Nerve pain goes away and stays away for a few hours but comes back and does not get better again. This is also of diagnostic value, as the pain is probably coming from the nerve(s) at the level of the injection(s), but the steroid, if used, was not of benefit.
- The Nerve pain goes away after the block and may come back later that day, but then it improves again over the next few days. This means that the block was of therapeutic value-the steroid had a long-lasting effect on the Nerve pain.

If you get good, lasting benefit from the injection, the block may be repeated. We also may be able to perform radiofrequency destruction of the nerves, which can last for a prolonged period (months to years).

Please note: This procedure cannot be performed if you have an active infection (and are on antibiotics), flu, fever, extremely high blood pressure, or if you are on blood thinners (e.g., aspirin, Coumadin, Plavix, Pletal). Blood thinners must be stopped five to seven days prior to the procedure. For your safety, please inform us if any of these conditions exists.

What are the risks of the procedure?

As the rib cage is designed to protect the lungs, there is a risk, although extremely small, of collapsing the lung if the needle penetrates the lung. This is called a pneumothorax. If severe, this could require the placement of a chest tube to re-inflate the lung. As with most procedures, there is a remote risk of bleeding, infection, nerve injury or allergic reaction to the medication used.

What happens during the procedure?

When you enter the clinic, you will be taken into an admission room where a nurse will check your vitals. Please wear loose-fitting clothing and note that you may be asked to change into a hospital gown. After your vitals are taken, an IV will be placed so that you can receive sedation during the procedure. Once you have been escorted to the procedure room, our nursing staff will then position you on narrow table. The site of the procedure will be cleaned with iodine and



Dr. Sabino D'Agostino

Dr. Walter Schuyler

Dr. Mike Tyler

Dr. John Tomarchio

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sterilely draped. Once sterilized, the physician will numb your skin with a small needle – the numbing process may sting.

Do your best to lay still and let us know if we are causing you discomfort.

Next, the physician will use an X-ray machine (fluoroscope) to guide the needle into the correct spinal position. The physician will inject local anesthetic –either with or without steroid - and then the needle is removed. This injection process is repeated for as many levels as needed. Upon completion, your skin will be cleaned, and Band-Aid(s) will be applied. The Band-Aid(s) may be removed the next morning.

Due to the local anesthetic, your pain may improve immediately after the injection. To understand the benefits of the procedure, please keep track of how you feel for the remainder of the day. The steroid usually takes two or three days to have an effect in most people and patients can expect peak relief in approximately two weeks. Remember – to help our staff provide you with a custom, comprehensive treatment plan, it is important that you keep track of the amount of pain relief you receive and how long the pain relief lasts until your next appointment.

What happens after the procedure?

Post procedure, you will be taken to the recovery area. Our clinical staff will monitor you for 5 to 15 minutes, take your vital signs and conduct procedure re-education as needed. Once stable, you may be discharged. If you experience local tenderness at the injection site, ice may help relieve the discomfort. You can also resume taking your normal pain medications.

Will I have any restrictions after the procedure?

Following your procedure, you are not allowed to drive for the remainder of the day. An adult must be present to drive you home or to escort you on another form of transportation. This is for your own safety. In addition, do not go swimming or soak in a tub or Jacuzzi on the day of your procedure. Otherwise, patients can resume their normal activities within their post-procedure comfort.

Things to Do Before the Procedure

- Any dietary restrictions will be discussed on the day the procedure appointment is booked.
- Take all your medications as scheduled on the day of the procedure, unless directed otherwise.
 - Think of any questions for us and write them down.
 - Make the nurses and physicians aware of any new changes in your medical condition.
- Before you come in, let us know if you are taking any blood thinners (e.g., aspirin, Coumadin, Plavix, Pletal) or anti-inflammatories.
 - Please remember to arrange for an adult to drive you home.

If you have questions about this procedure, please see a Southern Coast Specialists representative.

If you are interested in learning more about our practice or treatment solutions, please visit SCSpecialists.com.