

Pacific Coast Spine Institute and Pain Center

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Selective Nerve Root Blocks (Cervical, Thoracic and Lumbar Spine)

What is a Nerve Root Block?

A selective nerve root block is a minimally invasive procedure used as a therapeutic tool to relieve the pain you are experiencing in your neck, shoulders, arms, upper back, lower back or legs. It also will help determine the source of your pain. A selective nerve block is performed when symptoms seem related to a single abnormality and when there is a need to assess which nerve is specifically responsible for your symptoms. The period of pain relief following injection is variable and unpredictable in each individual.

What should I expect?

The injection site will be cleansed with an antiseptic, and the skin will be numbed with a local anesthetic. The physician will use fluoroscopy (X-ray) to guide a thin needle next to the selected nerve. The position of the needle is checked using X-ray contrast and then a steroid medication and local anesthetic will be injected slowly around the selected nerve. The procedure takes approximately 30 minutes from start to finish. During the procedure, you may feel mild pressure, tingling or cramping in your local extremities. These sensations are normal.

How do I prepare?

- If you are taking any anticoagulants or blood thinners such as Coumadin or aspirin, you must discontinue taking them 5 days prior to the scheduled procedure.
- Contact your prescribing doctor before you stop taking any medication.
- If you feel you need mild sedation, please discuss this with your physician. If you opt for any kind of sedation, you will need a driver for your appointment.
- Please inform your doctor if you are allergic to iodine, contrast material, or X-ray dye so that you can be pre-medicated.

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What happens after the procedure?

Because this is an invasive procedure, there are a few rare complications that may occur:

- arachnoiditis or scarring of the nerves - this is a rare complication
- temporary increased pain after the procedure
- inadvertent puncture of the spinal canal which could cause headache among other symptoms and may require rescheduling of the steroid injection
- adverse reaction to contrast material used, which contains iodine.