

Hampton Roads Radiology Associates

Patient Information

Nerve Root Block

Your referring physician has requested that you have a nerve root block. The following is a description of the procedure and potential complications, to better enable you to give informed consent prior to the procedure.

A nerve root block is an invasive procedure with some uncommon risks, so you will need to give informed consent. Local anesthesia (numbing medicine) will be injected underneath your skin. A needle will be placed with fluoroscopic (x-ray) guidance along your irritated nerve root. Occasionally, CT (or “Cat-Scan”) guidance may be used to help with needle placement. A small amount of contrast (x-ray dye) may be injected to help confirm the position of the needle. A mixture of a long-acting anesthetic (numbing medicine) and a steroid will then be injected. Since we will be positioning the needle along your already irritated nerve, oftentimes you will experience brief pain along your typical area of pain either during positioning or during the injection of medication.

Most complications of nerve root blocks are uncommon and the procedure is very safe. You need to know the potential complications, which include:

1. **BLEEDING:** As with all needle procedures, bleeding can occur. As long as you have no bleeding tendency and are not on any blood-thinners such as Coumadin, bleeding complications are extremely rare. However, patients have had to undergo emergency surgery to relieve pressure on the nerve roots and spinal cord because of bleeding after needle procedures like nerve root blocks.
2. **INFECTION:** Any needle passing through the skin can introduce an infection. This is a rare complication and sterile technique will be used.
3. **MUSCLE WEAKNESS/NUMBNESS OR BACK PAIN:** Often you will experience numbness along the area supplied by your irritated nerve. This numbness typically lasts less than 3 hours, but may uncommonly last up to 24 hours. If this nerve supplies a muscle, it may cause weakness in that muscle. This weakness should be transient, probably only lasting 1 to 3 hours or so. If this nerve becomes irritated, it may result in transient back pain or temporarily worsen your normal pain.

4. **STEROID SIDE EFFECTS:** Steroids injected at nerve roots may rarely produce unwanted side effects. Some of these potential side effects include increased blood sugar or hyperglycemia (especially in diabetic patients), fluid retention, elevated blood pressure, and transient redness or facial flushing. (Side effects from steroids may be common if they are taken daily over a length of time, rather than as an isolated nerve root injection.)
5. **ALLERGIC REACTION:** The use of any medication, including x-ray contrast, has the possibility of producing an allergic reaction. Please inform your physician of all of your known medical allergies before the procedure.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask the physician performing the procedure prior to signing the consent form.