

“Blocks” for hand Surgery



A “block” or “regional anaesthetic” is a type of anaesthetic that can be used for hand surgery as an alternative to general anaesthesia.

It involves using an ultrasound machine to place local anaesthetic near the nerves that give sensation and strength to the arm. The arm becomes numb and can’t move for several hours. Surgery in this state is straightforward and the patient is pain free and comfortable. Medications to induce a drowsy relaxed state (“sedation”) can also be given if desired.

Many patients choose this technique for various reasons, some of which may be:

1. avoiding the side effects of general anaesthesia such as nausea, vomiting, or drowsiness
2. preferring to remain awake and “in control”
3. improved pain relief for the first twelve hours

When considering this beforehand, patients can be anxious about not being “fully asleep”. However light sedation means that they feel very relaxed and calm, they may have a natural sleep during the procedure, and memories of the event are very “fuzzy”.

Alternatively, some patients are interested in the surgery, and can remain fully awake and observe the surgery using a video camera system.

Whilst this technique is very safe, and I have considerable experience over more than twenty years, there are small risks of side effects and complications:

1. Whilst generally blocks are very reliable, and we test them carefully before surgery starts, about 1 in 100 are not completely successful, and we may have to use a full general anaesthetic.
2. The nature of this technique means placing a needle very close to nerves. Sometimes afterwards there can be a small patch of numbness or area of weakness in the arm the following day. This typically lasts a day to a week, but around 1 in 5000 people may have some weakness or numbness that takes longer than 6 months to resolve.

If you are at all uncertain, and wish to discuss this in more detail or ask questions, please contact my rooms on the number below and they will be happy to arrange this.

Kind regards

Dr Chris Jones

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