What is a continuous peripheral nerve catheter?

- If you require a longer period of pain relief, your anesthesiologist may suggest inserting a continuous peripheral nerve catheter. This catheter is a thin plastic tube (about the thickness of a paperclip wire) that is inserted next to the nerve. The catheter is attached to a pump that constantly injects a small amount of medication around the nerve.
- Continuous peripheral nerve catheters provide excellent pain control for a longer time postoperatively (up to 5 days). Your anesthesiologist and surgeon will determine if a peripheral nerve catheter is right for you.
- Continuous peripheral nerve catheters have the same rare complications as single injection peripheral nerve blocks.

This brochure answers only some of the questions that patients frequently ask. If you have additional questions, please ask your anesthesia provider.

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If you need this information in an accessible format (Braille, digital, tape or large print) please contact the Department of Anesthesiology Administration, (520) 626-7221.
What types of anesthesia are available?

There are several types of anesthesia for surgery, ranging from local anesthesia to general anesthesia. Together, you and your anesthesiologist will determine the best type of anesthesia for your surgery based on the specific requirements of your surgical procedure, your medical history and your personal preferences.

There are in general four main types of anesthesia, which are often used in combination:

- **Local anesthesia**: The surgeon injects local anesthetic into the area to be operated on to make it numb.
- **Regional anesthesia**: An anesthesiologist injects local anesthetic around specific nerves that provide sensation to an area of the body being operated. Epidural and spinal blocks are used to anesthetize the abdomen, pelvis, and both legs. Peripheral nerve blocks are done to anesthetize just a single leg, arm or shoulder.
- **General anesthesia**: An anesthesiologist administers a combination of medications to produce unconsciousness so that you do not feel, see, or hear anything during the surgery.
- **Monitored anesthesia care**: an anesthesiologist administers intravenous (IV) pain and sedation medications during the surgery for your comfort while closely monitoring your vital functions.

What types of surgical procedures are peripheral nerve blocks used for?

Peripheral nerve blocks are commonly used for surgeries on the upper body and lower body. This may include the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, breast, foot, ankle, knee, leg and hip.

What are the advantages of peripheral nerve blocks?

- Often a nerve block will decrease your sensation to pain for a long time after surgery (6-24 hours). This provides better postoperative pain control, shorter recovery time and an earlier discharge from the hospital.
- When compared to general anesthesia, peripheral nerve blocks cause less nausea and vomiting, less lingering drowsiness, no sore throat and often a faster discharge from the post anesthesia care unit (PACU).
- The nerves blocked for shoulder and arm surgery. There are many others that can be blocked for other surgeries.
- During some surgeries, peripheral nerve blocks may reduce blood loss.
- The main advantage for most patients is less postoperative pain and improved satisfaction.

What are the disadvantages of peripheral nerve blocks?

- Complications with any type of anesthesia are very uncommon and rare. Complications of peripheral nerve blocks include infection, injury to blood vessels and the effects of local anesthetic medication accidentally injected into a blood vessel (increased heart rate, seizures).
- It is uncommon for a block to cause injury to a nerve. In the rare event of an injury, complete recovery usually occurs in 6-8 weeks.
- In the unusual case that a nerve block does not work completely, additional blocks, anesthesia and/or pain medication may be required. General anesthesia is always a possibility.

What can I expect with a peripheral nerve block?

- Once you and the anesthesiologist has agreed to a peripheral nerve block, an IV will be inserted into one of your arms.
- The peripheral nerve block will be performed in a special area outside of the operating room, where your vital signs can be taken frequently and oxygen can be administered.
- You may receive some pain and sedation medication through the IV before the peripheral nerve block is performed.
- The areas where the needle for the nerve block is inserted will be cleaned and numbed.
- The anesthesiologist will then inject local anesthetic around the nerves to make an area of your body numb. You may not be able to move this part of your body. The injection of local anesthetic causes very little discomfort. The peripheral nerve block will be tested by an anesthesia provider before you go the operating room for your surgery to make sure the desired area is numb.