

Lumbar Sympathetic Block

What is a Lumbar Sympathetic Block?

This is a specialized test used to diagnose and treat pain in your leg or foot. It is done on either the left or right side. The sympathetic nerves control many things in the body, for example- perspiration, heart rate, blood vessels or movement of food through the intestines. Sometimes sympathetic nerves do not function properly and cause pain. Reflex sympathetic dystrophy (RSD) or complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a chronic, painful and progressive neurological condition that affects the skin, muscles, joints and bones. The syndrome usually develops in an injured limb (a broken leg or following surgery). However, many cases involve minor injuries, such as a sprain. Some cases no cause can be identified.

To help determine whether RSD/CRPS is the problem a lumbar sympathetic block is done. This is an injection of numbing medicine into the sympathetic nerves in your spine. This helps to diagnose whether these nerves are the cause of your pain. Learning more about the cause of your pain will allow your doctor to treat you more effectively.

What to expect:

You will be called by pain management staff to remind you of your appointment details. Plan on being at the surgery center for at least 1 ½ hours.

- You must have a driver (no driving for 24 hours). Bring insurance cards and ID.
- **Bring a list of your medications.** If you have an infection and/or are being treated with **antibiotics**, you will need to reschedule after infection has cleared.
- If you are on any blood thinners, please let us know. You may need to be off these for a specific amount of time, and this must be approved by your prescribing physician.
- If you are allergic to shellfish, iodine, betadine or x-ray contrast- please inform your referring physician and the surgery center prior to your appointment as you may need to be pre-medicated for this procedure.
- **Do not take any pain medications 6 hours prior to your appointment.**
- Wear loose comfortable clothing. Specifically, shorts or pants that can be raised to the knee.

Your procedure will be done using x-ray guidance. The procedure involves inserting a needle through deeper tissues, so some pain is involved. However, the skin is numbed using local anesthesia. This procedure takes approximately 20-30 minutes, and you are monitored during and after the procedure.

What to expect after the injection?

Immediately after the injection you may feel warmth to your lower extremities. You may also feel some pain relief, this is a positive result. Again, this is a diagnostic test to see if you have RSD or CRPS. If you do not have a positive test, then typically this is not the problem and other treatment modalities will be discussed.

You may have some discomfort after the numbing medicine wears off. You may also experience weakness to your extremities after this procedure. Do not drive or operate machinery for the rest of the day. You may be referred to physical therapy after this procedure, ask your referring physician about this prior to your appointment.

You should follow up with your referring physician to discuss the next step within a few weeks after this appointment.

Report any of the following symptoms to your referring physician:

- Prolonged numbness in the thigh, groin or leg
- Increased pain at the injection site
- Redness, swelling or drainage at injection site
- Fever