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The Royal Liverpool
and Broadgreen
University Hospitals
NHS Trust

Patient information

Pain Relief after Foot and Ankle Surgery

Anaesthesia

This leaflet explains what to expect when you have had an operation on your foot and/or ankle. It is part of a series about anaesthetics and related topics written by a team of healthcare professionals (surgeons, anaesthetists, physiotherapist, specialist foot and ankle nurse), with input from patients.

Good pain control after an operation can be achieved with conventional painkillers (i.e. Paracetamol, Ibuprofen, Codeine and Tramadol) and Block-Local Anaesthetic Injections making the foot and ankle area numb for 12-24 hours after the surgery. This is commonly referred to as an 'Ankle Block'.

What is an Ankle Block?

An ankle block is a group of injections of local anaesthetic around the nerves supplying the foot and ankle area. The aim of the injections is to provide pain relief for the first few most painful hours after surgery. Your foot and ankle area will feel numb and heavy, and you will find it difficult to move.

The numbness slowly wears off and your sensation will return within 24 hours. When the ankle block wears off, you will notice the return of pain in the area and you may feel a tingling sensation in your foot at first. It is important you take painkillers at this early stage to help manage and control your postoperative pain

Your anaesthetist will discuss possible local anaesthetic injections with you before the operation and answer any further questions.

What is injected?

The injection may contain local anaesthetic on its own or a mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid.

Local anaesthetic is a drug that induces numbness: it may be provided by an anaesthetist, surgeon or other healthcare professional, depending on the technique used. Like all medicines, local anaesthetics may sometimes cause side effects, as well as the effects that are needed. You may experience dizziness, blurred vision, drowsiness and rarely loss of consciousness.

Serious side effects from the nerve injections are rare, and include fits, low blood pressure, slowed breathing and changes in heartbeat, which may be life-threatening. If you have any concerns about any of these effects, you should discuss them with your doctor.

What are the benefits of local anaesthetic blocks?

- They can improve pain relief after the operation, until they wear off.
- They do not produce nausea and sickness.
- They do not produce drowsiness.

What are the side effects?

- Sensation of pins and needles, as well as heaviness in the foot and ankle area.

What are the complications?

- Occasionally the local anaesthetic does not work as well as expected and you will need other pain-relieving tablets and injections during and after your operation.
- You may have some bruising or bleeding where the needles have entered the skin.
- There is a small risk of nerve injury as the needle is placed very close to the nerves.

How is the injection done?

You will be asleep or sedated when the injections are done. Needles are inserted below the skin in a few places around the ankle and foot, so that all of the nerves that supply the area can be blocked.

What will happen if I decide not to have the ankle block?

You can discuss your options with the anaesthetist on the day of your surgery.

What painkillers should I take?

The ankle block injections will help with immediate pain after the operation. It is still important to take regular painkillers as the effects of the ankle block will wear off. You will be prescribed regular painkillers. You will also have painkillers prescribed to take as and when needed, up to a maximum dose.

The choice of painkillers will be discussed with you and can include a variety of drugs.

Will I feel pain after the operation?

Foot and ankle surgery is often sore, with many patients experiencing at least moderate pain at some point afterwards. The ankle block will help with immediate pain but you should rely mainly on regular painkillers. Most patients say that the area was very sore for up to two days, and then the pain settles.

It is very important that you take your prescribed painkillers regularly after the operation to help with the pain.

Can I go home after the operation?

Most patients who have foot and ankle surgery can go home the same day as the operation. This will depend on a number of factors, including the type of surgery planned and whether there is somebody who can look after you at home. You will be told if you are undergoing daycase surgery (going home the same day).

You will be discharged with painkillers to take regularly and it is important to take these. It is usual to feel pain once the ankle block wears off, but this pain often improves after two days.

Your foot and ankle area may still be numb from the local anaesthetic area when you are discharged. It is important that you take extra care of this numb area until full sensation has returned. Before going home a member of the Physiotherapy team will see you and teach you some exercises to maximise your safety. They will check you are able to walk safely with crutches and use the stairs as needed.

Further information

Your anaesthetist will discuss this procedure with you before the operation and answer any further questions.

Local contact details

Tel: 0151 706 2430

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2430

Information about anaesthesia is available from the website below

<http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo>

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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