



## REGIONAL ANAESTHESIA - ANKLE AND POPLITEAL NERVE BLOCK

### Background

- Foot and ankle surgery is undertaken following the administration of local anaesthetic injections around the ankle or behind the knee (in the popliteal fossa).
- This renders the foot, ankle or lower leg to be numb for an average of 8 - 26 hours, depending on the type of block administered.
- Pain killing tablets are provided together with specific advice in order to make recovery as comfortable as possible after the operation.

### Benefits of the ankle nerve block

- Those undergoing forefoot to midfoot surgery
- Patients will typically be ready for surgery quicker with the blocking of pain for the operation, but the patient will feel movement and touch.
- Patients will retain their ability to move the foot and ankle, which will make it easier for weight bearing after the operation.

### Benefits of the popliteal nerve block

- Those undergoing more extensive foot and ankle surgery to allow for a longer period of numbness.
- Patients who cannot tolerate anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) or codeine based painkillers will benefit from a popliteal block for the longer analgesic effect.
- Anyone who has experienced insufficient pain control following a previous operation or knowingly have a “low pain tolerance”.

### Why is it called a regional anaesthetic nerve block?

- The main nerve/s that supplies sensation to the foot and lower leg are blocked at a specific level, which numbs the region of the body required for surgery.
- The aim of the injection is to numb the nerves (rather like when you have an injection for dental work or an “epidural” injection for childbirth), thus making the foot or entire lower leg numb.
- Depending on the operation, you may or may not be provided with crutches and shown how to use them to help you after your operation.



### How is the injection undertaken?

- You will be asked to lie flat or on your front, depending of where the injection is to be done to provide the block for your operation.
- Typically, an ultrasound scanner or doppler is used to help locate the nerve/s for the injection, this will help with the accuracy to where the local anaesthetic is administered and also helps reduce nerve irritation/injuries.
- On rare occasions a nerve stimulator is also used with the ultrasound scanner to find and confirm the location of the nerve/s, which causes the foot to twitch and move.

### Are there any side effects?

- Temporary injury to the nerve (s), this is however minimised with the use of guidance such as the ultrasound scanner. *Incidence = uncommon*
- Permanent injury to the nerve (s), this is however minimised with the use of guidance such as the ultrasound scanner. *Incidence = rare*
- Damage to vessels supplying or removing blood from the leg/foot. *Incidence = rare*
- Local anaesthetic toxicity (which may lead to cardiac arrest). *Incidence = very rare*
- Failure of local anaesthesia. *Incidence = rare*
- Failure of the block to offer pain relief. *Incidence = uncommon*



Very common

Common

Uncommon

Rare

Very rare

1 in 10  
Someone in  
your family

1 in 100  
Someone in a  
street

1 in 1,000  
Someone in a  
village

1 in 10,000  
Someone in a  
small town

1 in 100,000  
Someone in a  
large town

