

Department of anaesthesia and pain medicine

# Alcohol intrathecal neurolysis

Your doctor has suggested that you may benefit from this procedure. It is a specialised type of nerve block. Pain is transmitted by nerves so it is often possible to reduce pain by blocking signals from affected nerves. It is normally performed to relieve pain from cancer when the pain is localised to a specific area on one side of the body. It involves an injection of alcohol on to nerves as they enter the spine, with the aim of permanently disrupting them and so interrupting pain signals on their way to the brain. This leaflet is designed to help you make an informed choice about whether or not you would like to have it carried out.

## The procedure

An intravenous drip is put into your hand or arm beforehand. We do not give you sedation because we need to maintain normal communication with you throughout the procedure. You are positioned on a theatre table lying on your front. Local anaesthetic is injected into your skin overlying one or two points in your spine. After this, the doctor uses X-ray guidance to very precisely pass a thin spinal needle into the fluid-filled space around the spinal cord. Once the needle is in the right place, the table you are lying on is tilted to the left or right, and possibly up and down. Neat 100% alcohol is then injected slowly in very small amounts. You will feel burning in certain places in your body which should not be too uncomfortable. We will ask you repeatedly where you feel the burning and the table will be further tilted depending on your answers. After the procedure is complete and the needle removed, you will be kept on the tilted table for a further 45 minutes to allow the alcohol to 'fix' onto the nerves which are causing the pain.

You will be lying on your front for about 20 minutes for the block and then a further 45 minutes to allow the block to 'fix'.

## What are the advantages of alcohol intrathecal neurolysis?

- It is relatively quick and easy.
- It is usually effective.

## What are the disadvantages of alcohol intrathecal neurolysis?

- There are no guarantees that it will work.
- It can wear off in a variable period of time. Most patients can expect several months of pain relief but it may be less than this. If so, it can be repeated but may be less effective the second and subsequent times.
- The procedure can cause worsening of pain, immediately or after a period of time, although this seems to be rare.
- It may cause weakness of your arms or legs, although again this is uncommon.
- You might get a headache (1 in 150).

Continued...



- Paralysis, infection, bleeding, incontinence or urine and faeces, severe leg weakness and even death are possible, although very rare.
- You will be left with an area of numbness or possibly tingling where the pain-causing nerves have been disrupted.

## Where can I get more information?

If you have further questions that have not been answered by this leaflet, or if you wish to discuss anything further, please contact Andrea Rolland, secretary to Dr Scott-Warren on **0161 446 8493**. She will arrange for you to speak to Dr Scott-Warren or one of the specialist pain nurses.

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **[the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net)**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week