Stellate ganglion block

What is a stellate ganglion block?
It is an injection of local anaesthetic, a medication that temporarily numbs the nerves, around the stellate ganglion. The stellate ganglion is a collection of sympathetic nerves on the sides of the neck. The sympathetic nerves control functions like skin temperature, sweating, blood flow, and the action of internal organs.

Why is this injection done?
This injection is used to treat certain types of pain in your arm, chest, face or head. It is done to help to test if the sympathetic nervous system is responsible for your pain and to decide whether treatment is needed.

How is the injection done?
We will ask you to come to the surgical day case unit (SDCU, department 4) and a nurse will escort you to the operating theatre. During the procedure, the doctor will place a cannula (plastic tube) in the back of your hand to give sedation for relaxation or other medication if needed. We will ask you to lie down on your back. The doctor will check the correct site for the injection at the front of your neck, just below and to the side of the Adam’s apple. We will ask you to keep your mouth slightly open and not talk. He will inject the local anaesthetic into your neck. This takes a few minutes and can be repeated depending on the response. The procedure is sometimes done with the aid of ultrasound or x-ray to confirm the needle position before the injection.

What are the benefits of this treatment?
Blocking the sympathetic nerves can ease your pain although the pain relief may take days or weeks to take effect and may not be 100% complete. Some patients may not get any benefit at all. The effectiveness of the block is difficult to predict. For some patients, the block helps by reducing the number of painkillers you need to control your pain.

What are the effects after the injection?
After the injection, it is common to find that the arm on the side of the injection is temporarily warm and heavy with a sensation of pins and needles. Your eyesight may be blurred and the pupil of the eye might appear small with drooping of the eyelid on the side of the injection. The face may feel warm. Your voice may get hoarse and your nose might feel blocked up. Occasionally there may be some difficulty in swallowing. These effects are expected and usually wear off within 24 to 48 hours. Very rarely, a small number of patients may experience an increased level of pain.
What are the immediate side effects?
Very rarely the local anaesthetic may enter the blood vessel that supplies the head and cause light headedness and blackout. Other risks may include bleeding, difficulty in breathing, temporary weakness and numbness of the arm, injection into and damage to surrounding area and allergy to the local anaesthetic used.

What are the late side effects?
Late side effects that may develop when you are at home are extremely rare. However, if you experience swelling of the neck or have difficulty in breathing please go to the nearest Accident and Emergency Department immediately.

Advice and precautions
- You will need to stay in the hospital for at least one hour after the procedure.
- A follow-up appointment will be arranged, so that the doctor or nurse can review the effects of the block.
- You should carry on with your normal activities. Try to increase the exercises and aim to reduce your painkillers if the effect of the block appears to have been successful.
- If there are any concerns or queries please contact the pain clinic.

It is very important to tell your doctor or secretary of the pain clinic, at least a week before the injection if:
- you are allergic to any medications
- you are on blood thinning medication such as Warfarin, Fondaparinux, Nicoumalone (Sinthrome), Aspirin, Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- you have an infection near the injection site
- you think you might be pregnant
- you have had a recent heart attack or vaccination, please contact the pain clinic.

Contacts
Pain secretary on 0161 446 8493

Pain team
Dr Julian Scott-Warren, consultant in pain medicine & anaesthesia
Jennifer Nuttall, pain nurse specialist
Shiji Thomas, acute pain nurse
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.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

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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

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The Christie Patient Information Service
November 2017 - Review November 2020