



Popliteal Blocks for Lower Leg Surgery

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a popliteal block?

A Popliteal Block (PB) numbs the lower leg for surgery. Your anesthesia provider will do this procedure, either before surgery to provide anesthesia for the surgery itself, or after surgery, to provide pain relief. Either way, you will have **LESS PAIN** and require less medication with fewer side effects!

How is a PB performed?

The PB will be placed by your anesthesia provider either before or after surgery. Your provider will perform an ultrasound of the lower thigh, an area called the *popliteal fossa*. This is where the nerve which supplies your lower leg is found. A local anesthetic (numbing medicine) will be injected in this area. For some surgeries, a small catheter may then be placed and taped to your outer thigh (this is called a **CPB**, or **Continuous Popliteal Block**). This catheter will deliver a continuous infusion of local anesthetic. The process takes about 15 to 30 minutes.

Can I walk after I get a PB?

Yes! Follow your surgeon's directions regarding weight-bearing and walking. Parts of your leg will be temporarily numb and weak. **ALWAYS** ask for help when getting up until the numbness has worn off. Be extra careful about where you step while the bottom of your foot is numb.

How long will the PB give me pain relief?

Single injections last about 8 to 16 hours. Consider taking pain medication at bedtime, so that you are likely to have a comfortable night's sleep as the PB wears off. For CPBs, catheters usually stay in place and provide relief for 2 to 3 days. Once the catheter is removed, it will take several hours for the numbness and weakness to wear off. This is completely normal and expected.

Are there any risks to getting a PB?

PBs are very safe. All procedures are done using sterile technique and ultrasound guidance to reduce the risk of bleeding, infection, and nerve injury. Nerve injury is rare, and can be temporary or permanent, causing numbness, weakness, or burning pain. Talk to your anesthesia provider if you have specific concerns.

What if I have questions after my PB?

During your hospital stay, you will be seen by an anesthesia provider every day if you have a catheter in place. After discharge, you may call the KP Oakland Anesthesia Department at 510-752-6238 on weekdays, during regular business hours. For urgent concerns, call 510-752-1000 and ask for the anesthesiologist on call. If you are discharged with a nerve catheter, please read the handout, **Continuous Popliteal Blocks — Discharge Instructions and Frequently Asked Questions**.

This information is not intended to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have any questions, please ask your physician. If you have questions or need more information about the medications mentioned above, please speak to your pharmacist.

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