

## Lumbar Sympathetic Block

Sympathetic nerves are located on both sides of your spine in the lower back. These nerves transmit “fight or flight” signals to your lower extremities. A lumbar sympathetic block can be a part of CRPS treatment.

### **What is the purpose of a lumbar sympathetic block?**

To block the sympathetic nerves that go to the leg on the same side as the injection. This may reduce pain, swelling, color, sweating and other unusual changes in the lower extremity and may improve mobility. It is done as a part of the treatment of CRPS and other conditions.

### **How long does the lumbar sympathetic block take and what is injected?**

The actual injection takes from ten to thirty minutes. The injection consists of a local anesthetic and may include steroid medication to prolong the effects of the lumbar sympathetic block.

### **Will the lumbar sympathetic block hurt?**

The procedure involves inserting a needle through skin and deeper tissues. Most patients find this tolerable due to the local anesthetic. Some patients also receive intravenous sedation, which can make the procedure more comfortable. Most patients are awake and talking during the procedure.

### **How is the lumbar sympathetic block performed?**

It is done under sterile conditions with the patient lying on stomach. The patient’s blood pressure and oxygen level are monitored. The skin is cleaned with antiseptic solution and then numbed with a local anesthetic. Then X-ray is used to guide the needle into proper position along the outside of the spine and contrast dye is used to confirm its location. The medication is then injected gradually.

### **What should I expect after the lumbar sympathetic block?**

Immediately after the injection, you may feel your lower extremity getting warm. In addition, you may notice that your pain may be gone or quite less. You may also notice some temporary weakness or numbness in the leg, although this is actually not a desired effect of a lumbar sympathetic block.

### **What should I do after the lumbar sympathetic block?**

You should have a ride home. We advise patients to take it easy the day of procedure. You may perform activities that you can reasonably tolerate. After the block, it is a good time to go to physical therapy.

Unless there are complications, you should be able to return to your work the next day. The most common thing you may feel is soreness in the back at the injection site.

### **How long does the effect of the medication last?**

The local anesthetic wears off in a few hours. However, the blocking of sympathetic nerves may last for many more hours. Usually, the duration of relief gets longer after each injection.

### **How many lumbar sympathetic blocks do I need to have?**

If you respond to the first injection, you will be recommended for repeat injections to treat the

problem. Some may need only 2 to 4 and some may need more than 10. The response to such injections varies from patient to patient. We gauge how many by how well the patient is doing.

**Will the lumbar sympathetic block help me?**

It is sometimes difficult to predict if the injection will indeed help you or not. The patients who present early during their illness tend to respond better than those who have had symptoms for a very long time. Patients in advanced stages of disease may not respond much.

**What are the risks and side effects of a lumbar sympathetic block?**

This procedure is safe. However, with any procedure there are risks, side effects and possibility of complications. The most common side effect is temporary pain or soreness at the injection site. Uncommon risks involve bleeding, infection, spinal block, epidural block and injection into blood vessels and surrounding organs. Fortunately, the serious side effects and complications are uncommon.

**Who should not have a lumbar sympathetic block?**

If the patient is allergic to any of the medications to be injected, on a blood thinning medication, has an active infection going on near the injection site, or has poorly controlled diabetes or heart disease, they should not have the injection, and it may be postponed to a later time.