

STELLATE GANGLION NERVES



■ OVERVIEW

The stellate ganglion is part of the sympathetic nervous system that is located in your neck, on either side of your voice box. A stellate ganglion block is an injection of medication into these nerves that can help relieve pain in the head, neck, upper arm and upper chest. It also can help increase circulation and blood supply to the arm.

■ PREPARATION

The stellate ganglion nerves travel along both sides of your spine. They are associated with a wide range of bodily functions that you don't consciously control. These include blushing, heart rate, sweating and the dilation of your pupils.

A stellate ganglion block is used to diagnose or treat circulation problems or nerve injuries, including:

- Reflex sympathetic dystrophy
- Causalgia
- Complex Regional Pain Syndrome type I or II
- Herpes zoster infection (or "shingles") affecting the head, neck, arm or upper chest
- Phantom limb pain
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The risk of complications from a stellate ganglion block is very low. However, there could be bruising or soreness at the injection site. Serious complications, including infection, bleeding and nerve damage, are uncommon.

Side effects of the procedure may include:

- Drooping eyelids
- Red or "bloodshot" eyes
- Tearing
- Nasal stuffiness
- Hoarse voice
- Feeling of a "lump" in your throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Warmth or tingling in your arm or hand

These effects will subside within a few hours.

■ PROCEDURE

In preparation for the procedure, you lie on your back and are given medicine to make you feel relaxed. The skin and tissue of your neck is numbed. The physician inserts a needle and carefully guides it to the nerves of the stellate ganglion. The physician typically uses an x-ray device called a "fluoroscope." This shows a video image of the needle's position. Contrast dye may be injected to help confirm that the needle is placed correctly. Next, the physician injects medicine. It bathes the nerves. It can numb the nerves and reduce inflammation. If these nerves have been a source of pain, the medicine can relieve it. The injection may also provide other benefits, depending on your needs.

■ END OF PROCEDURE

When the procedure is complete, the needle is discarded and the injection site is covered with a bandage. You will be monitored for a brief time before you are allowed to go home. After a stellate ganglion block, many people experience some noticeable temporary effects. The arm on the side where you were given the injection may feel warm and tingly. Your voice may be hoarse. You may have nasal congestion, a flushed face and a droopy eye. These effects are normal, and they usually disappear after a few hours. You may need to return for more injections in the future.