

Introduction

Some people have pain in the lower back or legs. A lumbo-sacral nerve block can be effective to help relieve this type of pain. If your healthcare provider recommends a lumbo-sacral nerve block, the decision whether or not to have the procedure is also yours.

This reference summary will explain the benefits and risks of the lumbo-sacral nerve block procedure.

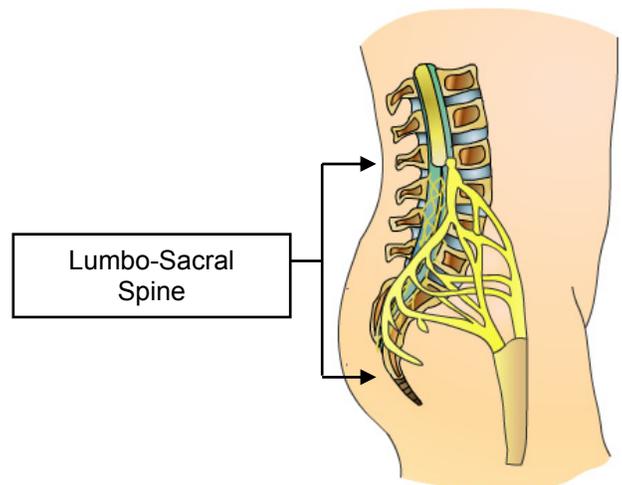
Lumbo-sacral Nerves

The lumbo-sacral spine is the lowest area of the spine. It is made up of the lumbar spine and sacral spine. Nerves travel through the spine and branch out to send messages from the brain to other parts of the body.

There are 5 nerves in the lumbar spine. There are also 5 nerves in the sacral spine. These nerves send and receive messages to the lower back and legs. When one of these nerves becomes pinched, it can result in severe back pain and possibly pain shooting down the leg.

The nerve is pinched by a bone growth in the spinal canal or by a protruding disk. This bone growth is called a spur. The nerves can also become inflamed and swollen. The swelling of the nerve results in severe back pain that may go down the leg.

When rest, over-the-counter medications, and prescribed medications do not help to ease the pain, doctors may recommend a lumbo-sacral nerve block injection.



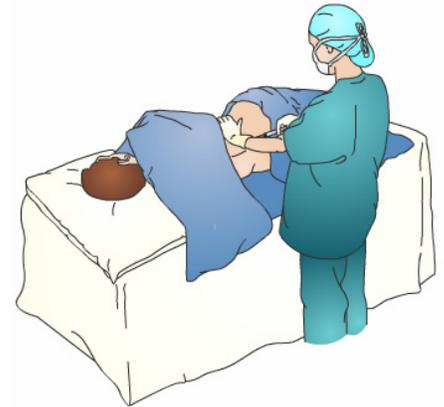
Lumbo-sacral Nerve Block

The aim of a lumbo-sacral nerve block is to numb a specific nerve and decrease its inflammation or swelling, which may lessen or stop pain. The medications used will be injected into a specific nerve canal of the lower back.

A needle is used to deliver the medication. Sometimes the needle is placed with the help of an x-ray machine and dye. The combination of medications usually consists of two types of medication. The first is a numbing medication to stop the pain. The second is a steroid that decreases swelling.

The first medication usually causes the pain to go away for a few hours. There may also be some numbness or weakness in the legs for a few hours after the lumbo-sacral nerve block. In 24 to 48 hours the steroid starts to reduce swelling. This helps to reduce pain further.

It is normal for the pain to disappear for a few hours after the injection. However, the pain may come back and may last a day or two until the steroid medication begins to work.



It may take multiple injections to achieve long-term relief. Usually the pain relief lasts longer after each additional injection. If the pain does not improve after multiple injections, you may need to try a different treatment option.

Alternative Treatments

Lower back or leg pain is usually first treated with over-the-counter or prescription medications. These may include pain medications or steroids to reduce inflammation.

Some patients with lower back or leg pain are not able to have a lumbo-sacral nerve block for various reasons. Other patients may only experience temporary relief from a lumbo-sacral nerve block. In these cases, alternative treatments may be needed.

Lumbo-sacral nerve block is one of many different injections a doctor could do in the lumbo-sacral area to reduce pain. Other such injections include trigger point injections or facet injections. Check with your healthcare provider if you wish to know more about these options.

In severe cases of pinched or injured nerves, surgery may be recommended.

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Preparing for the Procedure

Make sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medications you are currently taking. This includes over-the-counter and prescription medications, as well as supplements and vitamins.

Certain diabetes or blood thinning medications may need to be stopped before the procedure. Your healthcare provider will give you instructions.

You may be told not to eat or drink anything after midnight the night before the procedure. Check with your healthcare provider to see if a small amount of water may be used to take your medications in the morning.

The Procedure

This procedure takes about 15 to 30 minutes. Before the injection, the skin is disinfected and numbed with local anesthesia so that you will not feel the pain of the lumbo-sacral nerve block injection.

An x-ray machine may be used to guide the placement of the needle. Dye may also be used. The dye can confirm the correct placement of the needle before the medication is injected. If the needle is in the correct nerve canal, the medication is injected. This is usually not painful, although it may be uncomfortable.

After injection of the medications, the needle is taken out and the procedure is over. The injection only takes a few minutes. However, the procedure will take about an hour total.

You must have somebody with you to drive you home after the procedure since you will not be able to drive yourself because of the anesthesia. You can usually return to normal activities the next day.



Risks and Complications

This procedure is very safe. There are, however, several possible risks and complications. These are unlikely but possible. You need to know about the risks and possible complications just in case they happen. By being informed you may be able to help your doctor detect complications early.

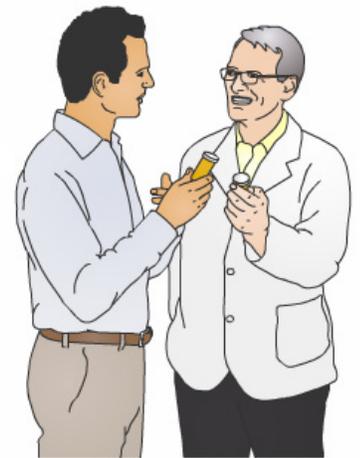
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In very rare cases infections may happen. Therefore, it is important to report to your healthcare provider any worsening pain or fever you have after the procedure.

Rarely, patients may have allergic reactions to the medications used. Tell your healthcare provider about allergies you may have to medications, particularly numbing medications. Allergic reactions could very rarely lead to death. It is therefore very important to inform your healthcare provider about each and every allergy you have, especially drug allergies.

Bleeding may happen, particularly if your blood is thinned. It is important to tell your healthcare provider if you are on any blood thinners such as Coumadin®, Advil®, or aspirin. This type of medication may have to be stopped for a few days to decrease the risk of internal bleeding.

The steroid used could increase the blood sugar in diabetic patients, accelerate the patient's heart rate, or increase the patient's blood pressure. It is important to check your blood sugar and blood pressure before such an injection, especially if you have diabetes, pre-diabetes or high blood pressure. If your blood sugar or blood pressure go up, contact your healthcare provider.



X-rays may be used during this procedure. The amount of radiation used is deemed safe. However, this same amount could be dangerous for unborn children. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or may be pregnant before the procedure.

The drugs used during this procedure also may not be safe for an unborn child. It is therefore very important to make sure you are not pregnant prior to this procedure. Be sure to tell your doctor before the procedure is performed if there is any chance you may be pregnant.

It is possible that a lumbo-sacral nerve block will not relieve the pain. In rare cases, it may even make the pain worse if nerves are damaged.

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After the Procedure

After the procedure, you will be watched in the recovery area for 30 minutes to 1 hour. This is to make sure no serious complications happen. After this time, you will need to have someone drive you home.

Your pain may be gone or lessened right after the procedure. You may also feel your leg become warm. There may be some numbness or weakness in the legs for a few hours after the lumbo-sacral nerve block.

You should rest more for a day or two after the procedure. Do activities that you can tolerate. You may feel sore.

For the rest of the day, you shouldn't shower or soak in water. Also avoid using heat on the injection site. You may use an ice pack to reduce swelling or soreness.

If dye was used during the procedure, you may be told to drink lots of water. This will help remove the dye from your body.

Sometimes physical therapy is used after a lumbo-sacral block procedure. Physical therapy can help with long-term relief.

Call your healthcare provider right away if you experience:

- A fever
- New leg numbness or weakness
- Severe pain

Also call your healthcare provider right away if you have any signs of infection at the injection site, which include:

- Discharge
- Heat
- Redness
- Swelling



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Summary

Some people have pain in the lower back or legs. A lumbo-sacral nerve block can be effective to help relieve this type of pain. The aim of a lumbo-sacral nerve block is to numb the area and decrease inflammation or swelling, which may lessen or stop pain.

It is normal for the pain to disappear for a few hours after the injection. However, the pain may come back and may last a day or two until the steroid medication begins to work.

Alternative treatments may include over-the-counter or prescription medications, as well as other types of injections. In severe cases of pinched or injured nerves, surgery may be recommended.

A lumbo-sacral nerve block is a very safe procedure that can significantly help reduce or end lower back or leg pain. However, as you have learned, complications may happen. Knowing about them will help you and your healthcare provider detect them early if they happen.



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