



Selective Nerve Root Blocks: Effective Spinal Diagnostic Tool

What Are Selective Nerve Root Blocks?

Nerve roots exit the spinal cord and form nerves that travel into the arms, legs, and chest. These nerve roots may become inflamed and painful due to compression or irritation from conditions like herniated discs or bone spurs. A selective nerve root block (SNRB) involves using a [fluoroscopic-guided injection](#) to place a temporary anesthetic (numbing) medication around a particular nerve root. The physician uses the response to this injection to determine whether or not this nerve root is the source of pain. By confirming or denying the source of a patient's typical pain, this injection provides information allowing for proper treatment.

SNRBs can help physicians diagnose the specific nerve root responsible for a patient's pain. By observing the patient's response to the injection, the specialists at Desert Spine and Sports Physicians can better understand the underlying cause of the pain and develop a more targeted treatment plan.

The Procedure Explained

Preparation for SNRBs

- You will be scheduled at one of the facilities listed below, where you will spend approximately 1-1.5 hours.
- You will be required to have a responsible adult drive you home.
- You should take your routine medications (ie. blood pressure, diabetic medications) on the day of your procedure.
- If you are taking Coumadin or blood thinners, please notify the office immediately.
- You must not eat any food six hours before your appointment.
- You may have sips of clear liquids up to two hours before your appointment.
- You may want to wear loose, comfortable clothing to your appointment.

The Procedure, Step-by-Step

1. You will lie face down on a procedure table. The physician will visualize the spine using fluoroscopic (X-ray) guidance.
2. The physician will scrub your skin with sterile soap, place a drape on your spine, and numb a small area of skin with anesthetic medication.
3. Once the anesthetic takes effect, the physician will direct a needle using fluoroscopic guidance into the space around a particular nerve root.
4. The physician will inject a small amount of contrast (dye) to ensure proper needle position and then a small mixture of anesthetic medication around this nerve root.

Post-Procedure Care

- Immediately after the procedure, you will be monitored briefly to assess your initial response to the injection.
- You will be provided with a pain log in order to rate your pain relief for the next several hours after the SNRB.
- Due to the local anesthetic, you may experience temporary numbness or weakness in the affected area. This usually subsides within several hours.
- The day after your procedure, you may return to your normal activities, including work.

Selective Nerve Root Blocks: Risks and Considerations

As with any medical procedure, selective nerve root blocks carry some risks. Common selective nerve root block side effects may include:

- Numbness
- Weakness
- Soreness at the injection site

Rare complications can include infection, bleeding, nerve damage, or allergic reactions to the medications used. You can minimize these risks by choosing an [experienced Physiatrist](#) like Desert Spine and Sports Physicians, where we utilize proper imaging guidance and follow strict safety protocols. Your healthcare provider will discuss the potential risks and benefits of SNRBs with you to determine if the procedure is appropriate for your specific condition.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Who is a good candidate for SNRBs?

Patients with pain that might be originating from a specific spinal nerve, often due to conditions such as herniated discs or bone spurs, may be good candidates for selective nerve root blocks especially if the diagnosis is uncertain. Your healthcare provider will evaluate your condition and medical history to determine if SNRBs are a suitable diagnostic option for you.

How long do the effects of an SNRB last?

Because an SNRB is a diagnostic procedure only, the duration of pain relief ranges from a few to several hours. During this time the patient will keep a pain log to determine how well the pain is relieved and for how long.

What is the difference between a transforaminal epidural steroid injection and a selective nerve root block?

The main difference between a transforaminal epidural steroid injection (TFESI) and an SNRB is the use of a corticosteroid. Both injections involve delivering medication into the epidural space around the spinal nerve. A TFESI uses numbing medicine and corticosteroid around the spinal nerves while an SNRB uses only numbing medication to help diagnose pain coming from an individual nerve root.

Find Selective Nerve Root Block Procedures in Arizona

If you are suffering from spinal nerve pain, selective nerve root blocks may provide the answers you need to improve your quality of life.

Connect with one of the [Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation specialists](#) at Desert Spine and Sports Physicians to learn more about selective nerve root blocks and determine the right approach to treat your pain. Our experienced team is dedicated to providing patient-centered, [non-surgical care](#) to help you regain optimal function.

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