

## Sphenopalatine Ganglion Block

### What is a Sphenopalatine Ganglion Block?

*Sphenopalatine ganglion block is a short, minimally invasive procedure that is effective for treating some acute and chronic facial and head pain. A sphenopalatine block involves either the insertion of cotton buds soaked in a local anaesthetic and other medication into the nose or an injection of local anaesthetic medication through the cheek into the area of the sphenopalatine ganglion. The block is usually temporary but the benefit can sometimes be prolonged by a radiofrequency treatment.*

### What is the purpose of a sphenopalatine ganglion block?

*Sphenopalatine ganglion blocks are indicated for difficult to treat pain arising the face and head secondary to cluster headache, trigeminal neuralgia, temporomandibular joints, post herpetic neuralgia, paroxysmal hemicranias, atypical facial pain, head and neck cancer. The block can be diagnostic by confirming the origin of the pain and it may also be therapeutic in some patients by providing sustained pain relief and functional improvement.*

### Are there any alternatives?

*A sphenopalatine ganglion block is rarely a first line treatment and you may consider trying other approaches such as simple painkillers, anti-neuropathic medicines, exercise, physio, Transcutaneous Nerve Stimulation (TENS) or acupuncture first.*

### The procedure is done in one of two ways.

*The procedure is performed as a day-case in hospital. You will be asked to lie in a comfortable position on your back with a small support under your shoulders and a small needle may be inserted into the back of your hand.*

- 1. The doctor will introduce a cotton bud soaked with local anaesthetic medicine into your nose and advance it until it reaches the back of your throat. Once in the correct position it will be left in place for 20-30 minutes.*
- 2. After your skin is washed with antiseptic and 'numbed', the doctor injects local anaesthetic under x-ray and nerve stimulation guidance through your cheek into the sphenopalatine ganglion. Tingling should be felt around the nose, if you feel tingling in your teeth or palate the needle will be repositioned. You may feel some discomfort during the treatment but this normally settles quickly.*

### What are the Benefits?

*Temporary relief of pain can be diagnostic. Generally, the longer the duration of symptoms, the less successful the outcome.*

### What are the possible side effects/complications of the procedure?

*All procedures in medicine carry a risk of complications which are minimised as far as possible. Generally injections are safe but occasionally the following problems may affect the face and jaws: no pain relief, more pain (temporarily or permanently), bleeding/ bruising, infection, numbness, allergy, nose bleed. The block can sometimes cause low blood pressure.*

### What should I worry about?

*Pain at the injection site is normal for a few days. Severe facial pain, swelling, fever and breathing difficulties are the main hazards. If you have any of these problems, go to the nearest emergency department and tell them you have had a block.*

### What will happen to me after the procedure?

*You will be required to stay in recovery for around 30 minutes, during this time your observations will be recorded regularly. You may experience numbness in your throat, light headedness, these symptoms are to be expected and should settle within a couple of hours. You should ask the nursing staff for help with refreshments; start with cool fluids, you must not eat or drink anything hot while your throat is numb. If symptoms persist, you may need to stay in hospital overnight for observation.*

### What should I do after the procedure?

*We advise patients to take it easy until the numbing medicine has worn off, then you can perform activity as tolerated.*

### Can I go to work the next day?

*Yes. Unless there are complications, you should be able to return to your work the next day. The most common thing you may feel is injection site soreness. Ice at the injection site will help with the soreness and you may use ibuprofen or paracetamol.*

### What do I do next?

*The aim of the sphenopalatine ganglion block is to reduce your pain to allow graded exercise program. Other treatment options include medications, radiofrequency treatment and nerve stimulation.*

### Important Notes:

*You must not eat/drink for 4 hours before the procedure.*

*Please take your normal medicines with a sip of water except blood thinners (aspirin is OK), insulin and diabetic tablets.*

*Ask your doctor for specific instructions if you are taking these medicines.*

*You must have someone else drive you to and from hospital and preferably stay with you for at least 4 hours afterwards.*