

STELLATE GANGLION BLOCK

For Severe Pain from Shingles



A Stellate Ganglion Block is an outpatient procedure for neurogenic pain. One of the conditions commonly treated with this procedure is Herpes Zoster, also known as Shingles.

What is Shingles?

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster is a condition that causes a painful skin rash. The chicken pox virus can stay dormant in nerve cells for decades and becomes active again later in life. Once you have been exposed to chickenpox, the varicella-zoster virus remains in your body's nerve tissues. Your symptoms resolve but it doesn't completely leave your body. It is inactive, but it can be reactivated later in life.



What is the stellate ganglion?

The stellate (or cervicothoracic) ganglion is a bundle of nerves that controls pain signals in your shoulder, arm, and face. The ganglion is located at the level of 7th cervical vertebrae in your neck. This nerve bundle is part of a large chain of nerves called the sympathetic chain.

What is sympathetically mediated pain (SMP)?

Sympathetically mediated pain is a special type of pain, which is not inflammatory like typical pain, but is caused by your nerves. Sometimes nerves become overactive and cause constants, severe pain. This is called sympathetically maintained pain. This type of pain often does not respond well to anti-inflammatory medication.

How do I know if I have Shingles?

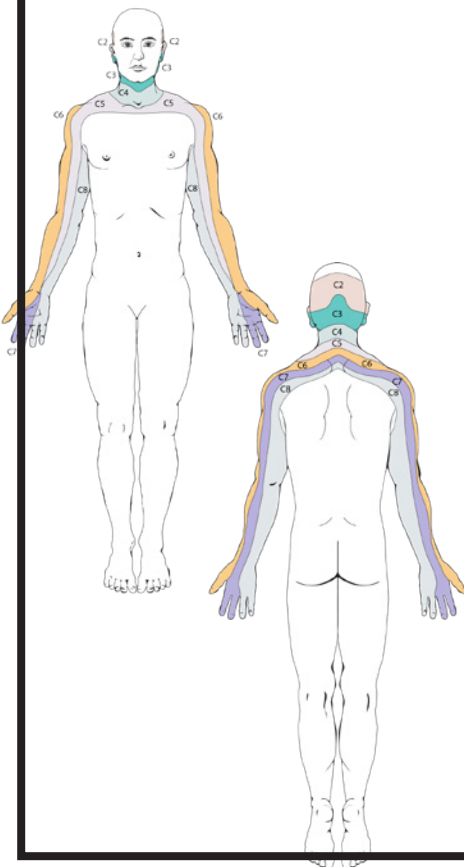
If you have constant burning pain and rash in your head, neck, upper back or arm, you may have Shingles. The pain is often in a dermatomal pattern.

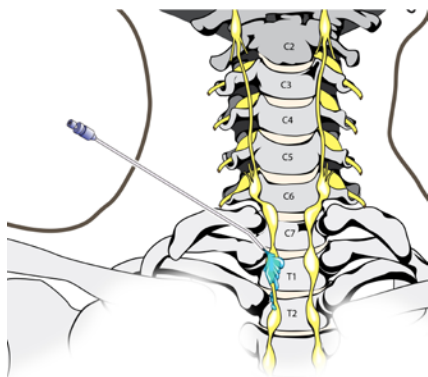
What is a stellate ganglion block?

In a stellate ganglion block, a local anesthetic (numbing medicine) is injected in the region of the stellate (or cervicothoracic) ganglion. This injection will block the transmission of sympathetic pain signals to the arm.

What happens during an injection?

A local anesthetic will be used to numb your skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle directly in the front of the lower neck, in order to reach the stellate ganglion. Fluoroscopy, a type of x-ray, will be used to ensure the safe and proper positioning of the needle. A dye may also be injected to make sure the needle is in the correct spot. Once the doctor is sure the needle is correctly placed, the medicine will be injected.





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What happens after an injection?

You will be monitored for up to 30 minutes after the injection. When you are ready to leave, the staff will give you discharge instructions. You will also be given a pain diary. It is important to fill this diary out, because it helps your doctor know how the injection is working.

It may help to touch and move your arm in ways that hurt before the injection, to see if the pain is still there, but do not overdo it. Take it easy for the rest of the day.

You may feel immediate pain relief and numbness in your neck and arm for a period of time after the injection. This may indicate the medication has reached the right spot. You can usually return to work the day after the injection, but always check with your doctor.

How long can I expect pain relief?

The extent and duration of pain relief depends on the severity of your Shingles. Sometimes an injection brings several days or weeks of pain relief, and then further treatment is needed. Other times, a single injection brings long-term pain relief.

This pamphlet is for general education only. Specific questions or concerns should always be directed to your doctor. Your doctor can explain possible risks or side effects.

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