An Interscalene Pain Block is given by an anesthesiologist before some surgeries of the shoulder and arm. Local anesthetic (numbing medicine) is given directly into the space around the nerves that supply feeling to the shoulder. This prevents or blocks pain impulses from reaching the brain.

- For some people, an interscalene block may be better than taking medicine by pills, shots, or IV (intravenous) injections for pain control after surgery.
- Your anesthesiologist may determine that this procedure may be unsafe for you if you have any bleeding problems or lung disease, or you are a heavy smoker.
- You may also choose to not have the block if it is offered as an option.

How is the block done?
You may be given some medication to help you relax and become sleepy.

- A needle is placed in the side of the lower neck near the collarbone. You may feel pressure, discomfort and/or tingling that move toward the shoulder or down through the arm.
- A device called a nerve locator may be used and you may have painless “twitching” of the muscles in the arm.
- An ultrasound machine may also be used to aid in placing the numbing medicine by the nerves that provide feeling to the shoulder.
- Once the needle is in the correct position, the numbing medicine is given and the needle is removed. It may take several minutes for you to notice the numbness.

How long does the block last?
Pain relief from the Interscalene Pain Block usually lasts from 12 to 18 hours.

- For much of this time, you will not be able to move your shoulder or elbow, and your arm will be placed in a sling.
- Follow your surgeon's instructions on using your sling even after your feeling and movement have returned.
- After about 12 hours, movement and feeling will begin to return and you should begin taking pain pills for pain relief as ordered by your surgeon.
- You will tend to feel less pain overall if you start taking the medication at the first sign of pain.

Up to 10% of the time, an Interscalene Pain Block does not work at all or pain relief may not last as long as expected. If this happens, your pain will be managed with other medications.

Are there any side effects?
An Interscalene Block can cause a weakness of your breathing on the side the block is performed. You may notice it may be a little harder to take a deep breath and your cough may be a bit weaker than normal until the block begins to wear off.
Most healthy patients without any breathing problems may not notice this.

You may also have temporary hoarseness, a slightly droopy eyelid, stuffy nose and warmer skin on your face on the side the block is performed.

Are there any complications?
The complications that may occur with an interscalene block include:

- Postoperative neurological symptoms: up to 7%
  - This may include pain, numbness, and muscle weakness of the affected shoulder or arm lasting a few days to a year.
  - It usually improves on its own within 2 or 3 months.

- Permanent dysfunction that will require treatment: about 5 cases in 1,000 blocks

- Seizure when the numbing medication is injected: about 3 cases in 1,000

- Accidental collapse of the lung: about 2-3 cases in 1,000

- Total body numbness for a few hours: rare

- Temporary blocked airway: extremely rare

- Death: extremely rare

Always discuss any concerns you have about anesthesia or postoperative pain treatment with your anesthesiologist.

Make certain that your questions and concerns are addressed before signing any consent forms.