

EMORY PAIN CENTER

Intercostal Nerve Block

What are intercostal nerve blocks? Intercostal nerve blocks are minimally invasive procedures used to diagnose and manage pain in the chest and rib area. The intercostal nerves are located between the ribs and transmit sensory information from the chest wall to the brain. By administering medication near these nerves, intercostal nerve blocks can help provide temporary pain relief and improve daily functioning.

What are the indications for intercostal nerve blocks? Intercostal nerve blocks are commonly used to treat pain conditions affecting the chest and rib area, such as post-herpetic neuralgia, intercostal neuralgia, rib fractures, or chest wall muscle spasms. They can also be helpful for diagnostic purposes to determine the source of chest pain.

How are intercostal nerve blocks performed? Intercostal nerve blocks are typically performed as outpatient procedures. You will be positioned comfortably, and the skin over the target area will be cleansed with an antiseptic solution. Using imaging guidance, such as fluoroscopy or ultrasound, a small needle is inserted near the intercostal nerves. A local anesthetic and a corticosteroid medication may be injected to numb the nerves and provide pain relief. The procedure usually takes around 15 to 30 minutes.

What are the potential risks or side effects of intercostal nerve blocks? Intercostal nerve blocks are considered safe, but like any medical procedure, they carry some risks. Potential risks and side effects may include infection, bleeding, nerve injury, allergic reactions to the medications used, or temporary soreness or discomfort at the injection site. These risks will be discussed with you by your healthcare provider before the procedure.

What should I expect after an intercostal nerve block? After the procedure, you may experience temporary numbness or weakness in the chest or rib area, as well as pain relief that may last for a variable duration. Your healthcare provider will provide instructions for post-procedure care, including any pain management strategies and activity restrictions. It is important to report any new or worsening symptoms to your healthcare provider and attend scheduled follow-up appointments.