Frequently asked questions

Will I need to take a whole day off from work for the procedure? Yes, but you should be able to return the work the following day.

If I feel up to it, can’t I just drive myself home? It is not considered safe to drive or operate other heavy machinery after this procedure. You should arrange for an adult to drive you home.

When will I be able to eat and take my medications? You should be able to resume eating and taking your medications after the procedure.

How soon after the procedure can I bathe? It is okay to take a shower that evening, but avoid taking a bath, being in a hot tub, or swimming.

When will I be able to remove the bandage? If you have a bandage, you will be able to remove it the evening of the procedure.

What are the possible complications? Although they are rare, some complications can occur. You may feel temporary pain at the injection site, and a cold pack can be applied for comfort that day, or if discomfort persists, some moist heat. Serious complications are very rare, but may include bleeding, infection, nerve damage or leakage of air from the lung into the chest wall cavity. If you have an increase in pain, become short of breath, develop a fever or chills, go urgently to the nearest emergency room to be evaluated for procedure complications.
This procedure may be recommended for patients experiencing an extended period of pain in the chest or rib cage area. The nerves that carry the pain signal for this area are found between the ribs and are known as the intercostal nerves. By numbing these nerves using a local anesthetic, the pain signal is blocked, and the patient should feel relief from their pain. Examples of patients who may benefit from this procedure might be those who are experiencing pain from Shingles (herpes zoster), or pain related to a prior chest surgery.

This procedure may be used for both diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, and takes about 20 minutes to complete. Preparation for the procedure and recovery from the injection will take additional time.

What to expect
- An evaluation from a pain management physician
- A detailed description of the procedure
- A discussion about potential risks, benefits, and any alternative treatments
- An opportunity to have all of your concerns addressed and questions answered to your satisfaction

Planning for the procedure
- Do not eat solid food for at least 6 hours prior to the procedure
- You may have clear liquids up until 2 hours prior to the procedure
- You may take your prescribed medications for other medical conditions with a small sip of water the morning of the procedure.
- If you are taking a blood thinner medication, please ask the physician who prescribed the medication for directions on stopping it prior to scheduling the procedure
- Do not take pain medication on the day of your procedure. If you are taking an opiate medication for pain, please ask the pain management physician on how best to schedule taking them.
- If you take a diabetic medication, you will need to discuss with your primary care doctor how best to take your medicine since you will be going without food for at least six hours.
- Bring all your medications with you. You will be able to take them as usual after the procedure
- Tell the doctor or staff about any allergies that you have, including medications, seafood, shellfish, latex, or x-ray dyes.
- Arrange for someone to drive you home after the procedure. You may be given mildly sedating medication, and it will be unsafe to drive or operate heavy machinery until the following day.

The day of the procedure

When you arrive:
- Someone will verify that you have followed the planning instructions and that you have a ride home with an adult driver
- You will have an IV (intravenous) line placed to provide fluids and a medication to help you relax, if needed.
- You will be asked to lie on your stomach on the operating table, and equipment to monitor your heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen will be applied.
- Your back will be washed with a sterile scrub and x-ray images will be taken of your spine.
- Your skin will be numbed with a local anesthetic for comfort
- Additional x-ray images will be taken using a small amount of injected dye to properly locate the exact injection site
- Once the site is located, a medication to numb the nerve, and possibly a steroid, will be injected

Immediately after the procedure:
- You will be in a recovery room for 30-60 minutes for observation
- A nurse will check your vital signs, and you will be offered a snack
- You will be given discharge instructions
- You will be asked to keep a record your pain relief and the duration of the relief