

Physician-Patient Script: Intense Pain After Block Has Worn Off

A script for dealing with this common pain relief scenario

This resource is part of the AAOS-ASA Pain Alleviation Toolkit, strategies for safe and effective alleviation of pain and optimal opioid stewardship. AAOS and ASA partnered to develop the toolkit, recognizing that empathic communication between the surgical team, patients, and families helps prepare patients for the pain of recovery from injury or surgery.

Empathize, normalize the pain, rule out problems, strategize, be available.

- Acknowledge that “It’s difficult when the block wears off....it can feel like something is wrong.”
- “It should get better from now on.”
- Ask “Are you using all of the pain management strategies we discussed?” then listen to the strategies they have tried and suggest those they have not.
- Then run through this script: “If you are having trouble getting comfortable the night after your surgery, you can try to:
 - Add acetaminophen if it’s not in the medication you are already taking.
 - Add ibuprofen or naproxen.
 - Stagger the acetaminophen and ibuprofen so that you’re taking one or the other every 3 hours.
 - As nerve block is wearing off, take the stronger pain reliever every 3 hours for the next 3 doses.
 - Elevate the surgical area.
 - Apply ice (bag of ice wrapped in a towel; 10 minutes on, 5 minutes off, repeat).”
- “Which one of those strategies do you think you’d like to try?” Listen for their response and validate their choice.
- “Do you have someone who can help you while you get over this bump?”
- “We’ll call you in the morning and see how you’re doing. You can page us through the main hospital operator if you think something is wrong.”
- “Can you repeat back our plan?” Listen to ensure they know what to do.
- “Tell me your questions.” Listen with patience and repeat any instructions that were missed.