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PHENOL (CHEMICAL) SYMPATHECTOMY

This procedure is often done to prevent or reduce constriction in the small blood vessels in your legs and feet. The aim to improve the circulation in the leg or foot but is also occasionally done to reduce pain in other conditions, where disease of blood vessels is not the primary problem. Excessive sweating is also a reason to have this procedure performed as the nerve block stops sweating.

You need to know the following facts

1. After this procedure your leg should feel warmer and dry. This indicates a successful block.
2. One patient in every five having this procedure will experience transient pain in the outer part of the thigh or groin. If this happens to you, it will start within the first 10 days and will last from 2 to 6 weeks before disappearing. This is quite normal and is known as post sympathectomy neuralgia. You may have to take painkillers for night time comfort.
3. This is considered a very safe procedure, with very few problems other than the transient pain mentioned above. Nonetheless, you should know that there is a very small risk - not more than 1 chance in 5,000 - that you may experience numbness or weakness in the legs. If this procedure has been recommended for the treatment of vascular disease, then the benefits of the procedure, in reducing the likelihood of other problems, which might prevent you walking properly, will far outweigh this risk.
4. For maximum precision and safety in performing the injection, it will be performed with the aid of X-ray pictures to ensure the drug goes in the correct place. The machine used for this gives a much lower dose of radiation than a normal chest X-ray.
5. For our convenience and your safety, the procedure will be performed in an operating theatre, but there will be no cut or stitches needed and it is often no more painful than giving a blood sample. Nonetheless, because patients are often nervous, you will be given some sedation. You will therefore have to stay in hospital for 2-4 hours. Afterwards and you must not drive or make any vital decisions for the next 12 hours. You should also be accompanied home by a friend or relative. Any problems should be reported to Mr Milne.

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