



Suggestions for Optimal Results Post-Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB)

Day of SGB

Take it easy on the day of the SGB. Go for a walk if you like, or some easy yoga, but no hard workouts or weightlifting. Avoid stimulating activities, such as video games or being around crowds.

Hoarse Voice: If you have some hoarseness or numbness in your throat, which can happen in 15% of people after SGB, take some small sips of liquid and see how you do with swallowing. People with hoarse voices can swallow, but sometimes the numb feeling in their throat inhibits the normal “feel” of swallowing. If swallowing immediately after the SGB is troubling for you, just wait 2-3 hours and swallowing will return to normal.

Temporary Headache: About 1 in 40 people experience a temporary headache after an SGB. The SGB causes temporary blood flow changes in the brain, and some people are sensitive to this. If the headache persists, it is alright to take acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain relief.

Eat Light and Avoid Alcohol: After SGB, eat light meals and have your last meal at least 3 hours before your planned bedtime. A full stomach interferes with deep sleep. Avoid alcohol at least on the day and evening of the SGB, and if possible, for several days after the SGB. Alcohol inhibits the deep, restorative phase of sleep.

Reduce Stimulants: If possible, avoid or reduce the use of stimulants, including tobacco or nicotine containing products, and even caffeine (a cup of coffee per day or equivalent is okay). These stimulants can be counterproductive to the overall goals of SGB therapy, which is to calm down and reset the fight-or-flight nervous system. If you are a normal user of any of these stimulants, try to decrease their use for several days after the SGB. Stopping the use of tobacco or nicotine is the single greatest step you can make for your health; we strongly recommend quitting.

Manage expectations: Don't worry if you do not sleep well on the first night after an SGB. Some people feel better right away after an SGB, while others can take up to a week to really notice the improvements. Try not to worry about how you feel right after an SGB. We are looking to improve your symptoms for much longer than a day or a week.

The First Month Post-SGB

Questionnaires: Please complete and return to us your PCL-5 and GAD7 questionnaires at one week and one month after your SGB. These will go into your medical record and help us make clinical decisions about treatment if your symptoms return. We personally review your scores. If the SGB was not as beneficial as you hoped for, consider a left-sided SGB.

Behavioral Health Engagement: We recommend that you regularly engage with a behavioral health specialist (preferably one trained in trauma treatment) who is someone you trust and can open up to.

Trauma focused therapy can be very productive for long-term improvement in symptoms. You

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may consider avoiding therapies for the next six months that focus on deliberate, prolonged exposure to past trauma. While engaged in trauma focused psychotherapy, if you are doing well, we recommend continuing with the treatment plan prescribed by your behavioral health specialist. After completing therapy, if you experience a return of symptoms, we encourage you to contact your behavioral health specialist and our physicians here at The Stellate Institute for further guidance. Our goal is to work as a team in your healing.

Tapering Medications: *Please do not suddenly stop taking your medications even if you are feeling much better.* If you are on medications for your symptoms, and your symptoms are markedly improved for at least a month, you should discuss gradually tapering your medications with your health care provider. These medications should be thoughtfully and gradually tapered under the supervision of the health care provider that is prescribing them.

Exercise: Physical activity is one of the most effective treatments for anxiety. Please engage in ANY form of exercise on a daily basis to help keep your anxiety symptoms down. Go for a walk, run, swim, bike, stretch, lift weights, do yoga or Pilates. Any form of moving your body that raises your pulse above resting levels is productive for reducing and controlling anxiety symptoms.

Slow Deep Breathing: Breathing is a very effective technique for calming the mind and body. Breathe in 5-6 seconds, pause, breath out 5-6 seconds, pause, repeat. Breathe in by allowing your abdomen (“belly”) to fill. It should feel calm and relaxing. Do this for 4 to 5 minutes upon waking, before bed, or at any time during the day that you start to feel anxious. This is a method of taking direct control of part of your autonomic nervous system and helping it calm down.

Stressors: As you are able, be aware of and carefully consider how much you are around people and situations that stress you out. It is productive to look at Post Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) as an injury (like a broken leg). Understand that this injury can be healed. Try to let go of any guilt you may have because of how you have behaved with your PTSI or anxiety.

Long-term Post-SGB

Further Treatment: If you are doing well, please reach out from time to time, we appreciate hearing from you. Many people do not need further treatment, but many will choose to have follow-on treatment at some time in the future if their PTSI symptoms return. We will all have occasional bad days, but if symptoms return and are persistent, they may need to be treated again before allowing things to get worse. If the SGB was productive for you and you gradually or suddenly have a return of symptoms, call us to see if an additional SGB could be beneficial in your case. If your symptoms return, remember that this in no way represents some failure on your part. People have different levels of stressors and challenges in their lives. Some people will require additional SGB treatments and that is okay. We are here to help you get better.