

Letter to the Editor

The Fingernail Cocktail: Improving Preoperative Preparation for Nail Procedures

To the Editor:

The anticipation of pain surrounding any nail procedure often creates a great deal of anxiety for many patients. All too often patients' fears are quickly confirmed with the initial pain of delivering adequate anesthesia to the finger. Many techniques have been described to ease the pain associated with local anesthesia including distraction, use of a 30-gauge needle or buffered anesthetic, slow injection, pre-injection with cryogen spray, and application of topical local anesthetics.^{1,2} We present a unified approach to the preoperative preparation for nail procedures that minimizes patient discomfort, improves preoperative antisepsis, and softens the nail plate for easier manipulation.

The "fingernail cocktail" is a simple and effective procedure that actively involves the patient. To help overcome the anxiety and initial pain of anesthesia, patients are enlisted to help mix this "cocktail" with their finger to ease the discomfort of the procedure.

Method

To create the cocktail, a cup or other suitable container first must be packed three-quarters full of ice, which is followed by a half-ounce or more of surgical soap that is then poured over the ice along with enough water to adequately immerse the digit without risk of overflowing the container. The patient is then asked to stir the mixture with the operative digit to rapidly blunt their sensation (Figure), which remarkably takes very little time, as most patients can only tolerate the cold of an ice bath for a minute or so. The digit is then removed from the bath and anesthesia is immediately administered as either a proximal or distal nerve block.

The solution is then poured off into a second similar container and the ice is discarded. Additional warm/tepid water is added to restore adequate coverage of the digit, which also serves to warm the mixture to a more tolerable temperature for 10 to 15 minutes to allow the digital block to take effect. Patients are instructed to periodically rub the injection points to help spread the anesthetic more quickly



Stirring this "fingernail cocktail" for a minute produces anesthesia prior to the placement of a distal nerve block.

while they continue to soak their finger in the now warmed solution.

Advantageously, while waiting 10 to 15 minutes for the nerve block to take effect, the nail plate and cuticles soften in the dilute antiseptic solution, which enhances antisepsis prior to a proper surgical scrub. The detergent action of the soap also makes the nail plate soften much faster than with water immersion alone. By softening the nail plate preoperatively, nail avulsion becomes less traumatic and partial nail plate avulsions as well as punch biopsies through the nail plate are much easier to perform.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 172