

Celiac Plexus Block

WHAT IS IT?

A celiac plexus block is an injection of local anesthetic (numbing) medication that blocks the nerves from sending signals to the brain, which results in relief from abdominal pain.

HOW WILL IT HELP ME?

The celiac plexus block may provide relief from chronic abdominal pain above the naval that is often due to cancer and pancreatitis, previous surgeries, symptoms of dysautonomia, or when other treatments have been unsuccessful. It can also be used as a diagnostic tool to determine the source of your pain. Most pain sensation from your abdomen must first pass through a bundle of nerves called a plexus, which sits deep in the abdomen next to the aorta and diaphragm. The splanchnic nerves connect sensation from your spinal cord to the celiac plexus and are found between T10 and T12 vertebral bodies.



WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

Upon arrival, you will meet with one of the healthcare professionals to discuss your medical history and to ask any questions you may have about the procedure, and an IV will be placed through which you may receive IV sedation to help you relax.

During the procedure, you will lie on your stomach. A local anesthetic is applied to the skin. Your doctor then uses an X-ray to guide the placement of a very thin needle to the proper position. Once in place, a test dose of dye is used to confirm the injected medication will reach the intended area. The doctor then gradually injects the medication.

Following the procedure, you will rest in the recovery area. You may have dizziness and your blood pressure may decrease for a few hours, which is normal. Therefore, you will be monitored for about an hour after the procedure. The nurse will review your discharge instructions with you before going home. If sedated, you will need a responsible adult to accompany you home. Recovery time is relatively short due to the nature of the procedure.

Temporary back pain from the needle insertion site is common, as is temporary diarrhea. Be sure to follow discharge instructions, and contact your doctor if discomfort continues or new symptoms develop.

HOW SOON WILL I FEEL RELIEF?

You may start feeling relief within 24 hours, though it may take a few days to feel the full effects of the procedure. The lasting effect of the treatment differs with everyone, ranging from weeks to years. Your doctor may suggest subsequent injections to continue the pain relief. If you achieved good temporary relief with the local anesthetic block, the injection may be repeated using a different drug (alcohol or phenol) which will damage the celiac plexus, thus blocking the nerves for a longer time. This is called a neurolytic (nerve destruction) block. Radiofrequency lesioning (using heat) can also be safely performed on the splanchnic nerves as an alternative.