

Internal (sensory) nerves group together in an area in the abdomen and are collectively known as a coeliac or solar plexus. These nerves carry pain signals from the liver, stomach and pancreas. Therefore injecting a block (numbing medication) into the coeliac plexus can sometimes provide relief of abdominal pain. There are two types of block – one using local anaesthetic and steroid and one (a NEUROLYTIC block) using nerve killing chemicals, such as absolute alcohol and phenol. The latter is only used for cancer-related pain.

### **Before your coeliac plexus block**

You will need to come in to hospital to have your coeliac plexus block. You will need to fast before the procedure – you should not eat for 6 hours before the procedure and after that should only have clear fluids (water) up until two hours before your appointment time at the hospital.

If you have a 1pm appointment this will mean a light breakfast before 7am and clear fluids up until 11am. This is because you will be lying on your stomach during the procedure and we may wish to give you a strong sedative medication.

You should take all your medication as normal, apart from diabetic medicine and anti-coagulants. Your blood must be clotting normally to have this procedure safely. You must advise the pain service of any diabetic or blood thinning medication that you take and we will advise you (and your doctor/s if appropriate) on what you need to do.

When you arrive to hospital you will be met by a staff nurse. A fine tube will be placed in a vein in your arm (IV cannula) before your procedure. This may be used to give you fluid and medications.

The coeliac plexus block is performed under X-ray control in the radiology department. The doctor will use a cleaning solution on your skin on your back.

Some local anaesthetic (numbing medication) will be injected into your skin. This will sting a little at first and then you will feel numb. A slightly larger needle is then introduced through the numb area to reach the coeliac plexus. At this time more x-rays will be taken to check the position of this needle. Once it is in the right place nerve block medication will be injected.

Please let your doctor know if you find this uncomfortable at any time.

### **Possible complications**

**Bruising:** As with any injection some bruising around the injection site may occur. This is normal and will heal within a few days or a week. When the bruising occurs in the deeper muscles you may experience some aching type pain. Please take oral pain relief as directed by your doctor to control this.

**Low blood pressure:** This is common. After a coeliac plexus block the blood vessels in the abdomen may enlarge, reducing your blood pressure. We treat this by giving fluids through the tube in your arm (IV fluids). A low blood pressure may cause you to feel light headed or sickly particularly when standing from sitting or lying (postural hypotension). You should take care to stand slowly for the first few days after the procedure.

**Tingling sensation:** You may experience a tingling sensation, metallic taste or light headedness after

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the injection. This sometimes occurs when a small amount of the solution enters the large veins in the abdomen. These sensations are temporary.

**Diarrhoea:** This is common. The coeliac plexus block will alter the way the nerves that moderate gut function, work. It is normally self-limiting. If you are on high doses of opioids (morphine-type drugs) it may not be noticeable.

**Infection:** As with any injection through the skin there is the chance of bacteria gaining entry

### **Less common but significant risks**

these include:

**Pneumothorax.** Air inside the chest cavity causing the lung to collapse. This would present as severe chest pain and difficulty breathing. You should immediately attend the Emergency department in this eventuality.

**Retroperitoneal haematoma.** Bleeding behind the abdominal cavity. This would present as abdominal pain.

**Haematuria.** Blood in the urine.

### **Groin pain**

**Allergy:** It is possible you may have an allergic reaction to the medication used. This is an extremely rare occurrence. If it does happen you may feel hot, have a swollen tongue or develop a rash. Please tell your doctor immediately if any of these symptoms occur.

**Paraplegia and Incontinence:** There is a reported incidence of 1 in 1000 patients developing permanent loss of use of their legs and loss of bladder and bowel function following NEUROLYTIC coeliac plexus blocks. This is historical data and may not reflect current practises.

## **After your procedure**

You may need to stay one night in hospital. This is so we can monitor your blood pressure and give you IV fluids if you need. You may need to take oral pain relief for a few days after your block due to pain from the bruising around the injection site.

You should plan for a responsible adult to collect you from hospital when you are ready to leave, we do not recommend you drive yourself home or take public transport. It is a good idea to have someone available to support you once you are home for the first day at least.

**Opioid tapering:** You may be able to significantly reduce morphine-type drugs after a successful NEUROLYTIC block. Your doctor will advise you, but please confirm you are familiar with your individual plan and who you will contact for advice out-of-hours.

## **Note**

The procedure cannot be performed if you have an active infection, flu, cold, fever, other unstable illness, very high blood pressure or if your blood is not clotting normally. This is for your safety!

## **Contact us**

Wellington Regional Pain Service

Department of Anaesthesia

Phone: 04 385 5344

Hours:

Or you can contact **HealthLine**, a free health information service. 0800 611 116