

Celiac Plexus Block

What is a celiac plexus block?

A celiac plexus nerve block is an injection of pain medicine used to help manage abdominal (belly) pain due to gastrointestinal (GI) cancer. During this procedure, pain medicine is injected directly into the bundle of nerves called the **celiac plexus**, which is responsible for carrying pain signals to your abdomen.

The **celiac plexus** is located between your diaphragm and stomach. This bundle of nerves surrounds the aorta, the main artery (blood vessel) in your abdomen. Blocking these nerves from carrying pain information can help relieve pain in your abdomen caused by a problem in the liver, pancreas, gallbladder, stomach, spleen, kidneys, or intestines.

How is a celiac plexus block done?

To begin the procedure for your celiac plexus block, you will lie on your stomach on an x-ray table. Your doctor will numb an area of skin on your back with a local anesthetic (a medicine that can block sensation). Then, guided by an x-ray, they will:

- Insert a thin needle into your back, next to your spine, and inject the anesthetic
- Insert a second needle on the other side of your spine
- Inject dye through this needle to confirm that the medicine will go to the correct spot in your body
- Inject anesthetic pain medicine (such as bupivacaine or lidocaine, and a steroid; alcohol or phenol also may be injected to destroy the nerves.)

In most cases, the procedure takes less than 30 minutes and you can go home the same day.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

How long does the celiac plexus block work?

Pain relief from a celiac plexus block may vary for each person, however, when effective, typical pain relief lasts up to 3 months.

This procedure can be repeated in the future once the pain relief has worn off. Pain relief may last longer with each repeat celiac plexus injection. Most people need a series of injections to continue the pain relief. Sometimes it takes only two injections, sometimes it can take several.

What are the risks of a celiac plexus block?

As with any procedure, it is possible for complications to happen, however, the risk of complications from a celiac plexus block is very low. Possible side effects following this procedure may include:

- Bruising or soreness at the injection site
- Low blood pressure
- Diarrhea

More serious complications, although uncommon, include:

- Collapsed lung (pneumothorax)
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Nerve damage
- Paralysis

What happens after the celiac plexus block?

After your celiac plexus block your abdomen may feel warm or “different”. You may also begin to feel less abdominal pain. Your abdominal wall or leg may feel numb or weak, but this feeling will improve as the anesthetic wears off.

You can continue your regular diet and normal medicines immediately. Do not drive or do any rigorous activity for 24 hours after the procedure. You can return to your normal activities after 24 hours have passed since your celiac plexus block.

Many patients feel some pain relief immediately after the procedure, although it may take 2 to 5 days after the procedure before the full effects are felt.

Is a celiac plexus block right for you?

A celiac plexus block may be right for you if you have chronic abdominal pain due to GI cancer which does not respond to other pain medicine. Many patients report abdominal pain that feels like it wraps around to their back, that improves after the celiac plexus block.

There is a better chance of a celiac plexus block relieving your pain if you have the procedure early in your illness. If you have GI cancer the celiac plexus block can provide:

- Better pain control
- Less opioid (narcotic) use
- Fewer opioid-related (narcotic) complications and side effects (such as constipation and sedation)
- Improved quality of life

If you have any questions about scheduling a celiac plexus block or if it is right for you, feel free to contact the Physical Medicine & Rehab Department's Outpatient James Clinic at Martha Morehouse at 614-366-8700 to schedule an appointment to discuss further.