

COELIAC PLEXUS BLOCK FACT SHEET



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This fact sheet aims to answer some general questions about the coeliac plexus block. Please read the following information carefully. If you need further information, please ask your doctor or pain nurse.

What Is the Coeliac Plexus?

The coeliac plexus (also commonly called the solar plexus) is a bundle of nerves within the upper abdomen. The coeliac nerves allow the pancreas, gallbladder, intestines, liver and stomach to communicate with the brain and spinal cord.

What Is a Coeliac Plexus Block?

A coeliac plexus block is an interventional procedure consisting of an injection that targets the coeliac nerves to interrupt their ability to send pain messages to the brain.

Why Perform a Coeliac Plexus Block?

For various reasons, the coeliac plexus may become injured or compressed, which results in abdominal pain. Some common conditions in which the coeliac plexus may be affected include pancreatic tumours and chronic pancreatitis.

Patients can require strong medication, such as opioids, to control this pain.

Despite medication, it may still be possible to have periods of intense pain. Additionally, pain medication can cause unwanted side effects like drowsiness, fatigue and constipation.

A coeliac plexus block can help to minimise the occurrences of intense pain. It is important to remember that the block usually does not stop all pain, but it may lessen the need to use pain medication.

Most patients feel some, although not total, relief from pain after the procedure. The benefit of the coeliac nerve block can last up to three to six months. A repeat coeliac plexus block can be considered.

What Happens Before and After the Procedure?

It is recommended that blood-thinning products be stopped prior to the procedure. You will be advised on the recommendation for your specific circumstances when we confirm your procedure. You will be able to continue taking all your other medications with a

sip of water on the day of your procedure.

Please refer to the *Interventional Procedure Pre-Admission Fact Sheet* for further, detailed information.

What Happens During the Procedure?

A coeliac plexus block is performed under imaging guidance in the operating theatre or radiology department. The whole procedure usually takes 30 - 60 minutes. You will be sedated prior to the procedure. It is likely that you will also be required to lay on your abdomen for the duration of the procedure, however the doctor performing the procedure on the day will confirm this with you.

Local anaesthetic will be injected under your skin to numb the discomfort of the block needle. A different local anaesthetic will then be injected to the coeliac plexus to numb the nerves. In some cases, a substance to permanently damage the nerves may be used (the damage to the nerves may result in longer pain relief).

What Are Possible Side Effects?

Any invasive interventions, including a coeliac plexus block, may cause complications that can be serious. By

performing the procedure under imaging guidance and sterile conditions, we aim to minimise the risk of serious complications. The procedure is not recommended for patients taking blood-thinning medicines in which this medicine cannot be stopped safely, or who have an infection or bowel blockage.

Common side effects include:

- Pain, tenderness, swelling or bruising around the injection
- Muscle spasm at the area of injection
- Diarrhoea
- Low blood pressure

Less common, but also possible complications:

- Infection (around the injection site internally or externally)
- Bleeding (around the injection site internally or externally)
- Allergic reaction to the dye or medicines injected
- Delayed emptying of the stomach
- Damage to the kidneys and/or surrounding organs
- Local anaesthetic toxicity
- Injury to surrounding nerves
- Damage to the spinal cord and paralysis
- Failure of injection