

Transversus Abdominis Plane (TAP) Blocks for Surgery

A transversus abdominis plane (TAP) block numbs the nerves on the front of the stomach after the nerves have left the spinal cord. Under ultrasound help, the anesthesia doctor injects numbing medicine in between the layers of muscle in your stomach. The front of your stomach should become numb from the TAP block. Even though this is a one-time injection, the numbness and pain relief should last between 12-24 hours.

When is a TAP block performed?

A TAP block can be done for patients having surgery involving the stomach wall. These surgeries could be a hysterectomy, hernia repair, or kidney surgery. When a patient is not able to have an epidural, a TAP block may be another choice. Depending on the length and type of surgery, a TAP block can be done before or after surgery. Your anesthesia doctor will talk about the risks and benefits of a TAP block with you.

Is the pain control as good as an epidural?

A TAP block is usually a one-time injection and a catheter is not placed. A TAP will start to wear off after 12-24 hours. With an epidural, the numbing medicine and pain control will last a number of days. This is because of the steady release of medicine through a catheter. The numbness from a TAP block may not be as dense or complete as numbness from an epidural.

What are the risks of a TAP block?

TAP blocks are very safe. There is a very small risk of bleeding or infection from the TAP block. Patients who cannot have epidurals because of blood thinning medicines or bleeding disorders may be able to have a TAP block. In rare cases, an accidental injection of numbing medicine could go into a blood vessel during a TAP block. This could have serious effects on your heart. Accidental puncturing of the bowel with the needle used for the TAP block would be very rare.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©4/2015. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7297.