



ACNES and Nerve Blocks



Any surgical or invasive procedure carries risks. Before proceeding, you should seek a second opinion from an appropriately qualified health practitioner.

ACNES (Abdominal Cutaneous Nerve Entrapment Syndrome) and nerve blocks

What is ACNES?

ACNES is Abdominal Cutaneous Nerve Entrapment Syndrome.

It means that one of the dental-floss thin nerves that provide sensation to the wall of the abdomen, is being squashed as it comes from deep inside to the surface through the abdominal muscles.

This causes a spot of pain on the abdominal wall that can usually be located with one finger. This can be worse with contracting the abdominal muscles. Often there is altered sensation to ice (it feels more cold or less cold) in the area of the pain.

It is estimated that 10-20% of all chronic abdominal pain is due to ACNES. This makes it a relatively common but poorly known about cause of pain

What are the treatment options?

1. Nerve block

ACNES can often respond very well to procedures.

A simple local anaesthetic injection can be done in clinic or a more advanced procedure can be done in the operating theatre.

The local anaesthetic can improve symptoms lasting from hours to permanently (if it frees up the constriction). The local anaesthetic has an anti-inflammatory effect on the nerve and also the pressure effect of injecting the liquid local anaesthetic around the nerve may free it up from constriction.

2. Rectus sheath block under ultrasound

This involves a deeper injection into the abdominal muscles. An ultrasound is used to guide the needle to inject around the nerve deeper down in the muscle than cannot be reached otherwise.

3. Pulsed Radiofrequency

With the rectus block often a strong magnetic current (RF) is applied to the needle to "Scramble" the nerve's pain signals. This prolongs the duration of pain relief for potentially many months, up to year.

4. Alcohol of phenol ablation

This involves destroying the nerve with an injection of alcohol or phenol.

This can provide years of pain relief but there is a risk of flaring up the pain as well as permanent numbness of the abdominal wall.

As the phenol can sometimes go to unexpected places there is a theoretical risk of damage to nerve to the legs or elsewhere. As such this is usually reserved for severe pain where nothing else helps.





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