

# Stellate Ganglion Block Treatment For PTSD At VA

Stellate ganglion block (SGB) may have short-term benefit for some individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but it is not an established treatment at this time because the evidence is not conclusive. The long-term effects of SGB are unknown, and SGB has not been fully researched in Veterans with PTSD. Currently, individuals with PTSD should be strongly encouraged to try established, and recommended treatments such as **trauma-focused psychotherapy** and medications. For Veterans that don't benefit from these traditional treatments, alternative interventions such as SGB might be considered.

Veterans who are enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care can contact their mental health provider for more information about SGB. SGB is sometimes used to treat pain, and some VA facilities may offer it in that context. Any decisions to offer SGB as an experimental procedure for PTSD would be made by the local VA facility leadership and provided by a trained specialist (e.g., anesthesiologist or other similarly trained medical provider).

## SGB may be an option for a Veteran who:

- » Is diagnosed with PTSD
- » Has tried evidence-based PTSD treatment, including psychotherapy and medications, and has *not* experienced significant or lasting PTSD symptom improvement
- » Is currently under the care of a VA mental health provider

## How can SGB help?

SGB may reduce symptoms of PTSD for at least a few weeks. A second injection may provide additional benefit in some individuals. It is possible that SGB may be helpful when used in combination with evidence-based PTSD treatment, such as prolonged exposure therapy, cognitive processing therapy, or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy.

## For more information on SGB:

- » Check out the **VA Evidence Synthesis Program** brief on SGB for PTSD.
- » View the VA **HSR&D cyberseminar** on the Department of Defense trial of SGB for PTSD.
- » Visit the **HAP webpage**.
- » Contact your VA mental health provider.

## About the procedure

Imaging (like an X-ray or ultrasound) is used to guide a needle near a bundle of nerves called the stellate ganglion, located near the base of the neck. A local anesthetic is injected next to the nerve tissue. In a recent VA clinical demonstration project led by VHA's National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships (HAP) and VA Long Beach Healthcare System (HCS), more than 185 treatments were given with no harmful effects. However, serious harmful effects are still possible with SGB.

