About Your Percutaneous Transhepatic Cholangiography

What is it used for?
Percutaneous transhepatic cholangiography (PTC) looks at the bile duct system in the liver. This test is done in the X-ray department. A thin needle is put through the skin (percutaneous) and through the liver (transhepatic) into the bile duct. X-ray dye is injected to outline the bile duct system (cholangiography).

Bile is a body fluid that helps your body digest fats. It is made by the liver and carried to the small intestine through the ducts. If the ducts become narrow or blocked, it can cause problems, such as jaundice (yellowing of the skin) or pain.

At times, the X-ray doctor may insert a thin tube (catheter) into the bile to drain into a collection bag outside the body. This is called biliary drainage.

What can I expect before the procedure?
• You will be asked to have lab work before your test.
• You will be told to not eat or drink anything before your test.
• The radiologist will explain the test to you and ask you to sign a consent form. Be sure to tell the staff if you have allergies to medications/contrast dye or think that you may be pregnant.
• You will have an IV started so the nurses can give you medicine to relax during your test.

What can I expect during the procedure?
• You will be asked to lie on an X-ray bed for the test. Please let the staff know what they can do to make you comfortable because it is important that you lie still during your test.
• The staff will wash and cover your skin around the area where the needle is put to help prevent infection. The X-ray doctor will numb this area of your skin by injecting a local anesthetic through a small, thin needle. You will feel pressure and burning during the injection.
• The doctor will then put a needle into the bile duct and inject dye to take X-rays of your bile duct system.
• If your X-rays show blockage of the bile ducts, the doctor may place a tube into the duct. That tube will be put into the small intestine and may be connected to a small pouch outside the body or capped.
• The test usually takes about one hour but may take longer if drainage tubes need to be placed.

Discharge instructions:
• Keep the drain site clean and dry.
• You may shower, but to help prevent an infection you should put a waterproof covering over the drain site while in the shower.
• Your nurses will let you know what you need to do with the drainage tube.
  – The care will be different if the tube is capped or connected to a small pouch to collect the bile fluid.
• No lifting, pushing or pulling more than 10 pounds for the next 10 to 14 days.
• Call your doctor if you have any of these:
  • Fever over 101°F.
  • Redness, tenderness or warmth around the drainage tube.
  • Increased drainage around the tube site.
  • Pain in your chest, shoulder, arm or neck that does not go away or gets worse.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.