



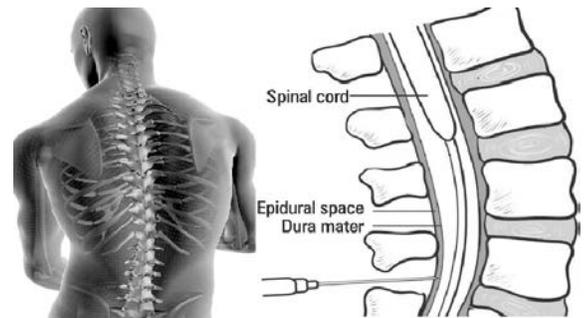
PATIENT CARE SERVICES

Epidural Patient Information Sheet

What is an epidural?

An epidural (or epidural analgesia) is a form of pain control that is often used because it controls pain well, has fewer side effects, and a shorter recovery time.

An Anesthetist (a Doctor that specializes in pain medication) inserts a very thin needle into an area in your back called the epidural space. Then a catheter, a thin plastic tube, is threaded through that needle and can deliver medication into the epidural space. The needle is removed and the catheter is secured into place with a dressing. The medication works by soaking the nerves in the epidural space which blocks nerve signals, including pain. The location of needle placement will affect the area where the pain will be blocked.



What are the side effects?

Common side effects of epidural pain medication include **nausea and vomiting, itching, constipation, dizziness, change in bladder habits and numbness or weakness in legs and feet.** Some of these side effects can be treated with medication. Other side effects may need to be treated by giving a lower dose of epidural pain medication.

Warning signs of receiving too much epidural pain medication includes severe **headache, back pain, metallic taste in your mouth or numb lips or tongue.** In order to monitor you for these side effects, your Nurse will be checking your vital signs (temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate) and sensation often.

Make sure to tell your Nurse if you are having any of the above warning signs

How does it work?

Pain medication is given through the catheter at a steady rate or as a one-time dose. The right dose of medicine will block the pain but you will also still be able to feel and move your arms and legs. Too little medication will not control your pain.

What are the benefits of having an epidural?

There are fewer side effects that can affect your bowels like constipation. Pain can be controlled quicker, for longer periods of time and can be targeted more precisely. It also reduces risk of post-operative problems with your heart and lungs.

What are the risks for having an epidural?

An infection can develop where the needle has entered into the epidural space, your blood pressure can lower as a side effect of the medicine, your breathing can slow down or the medication can make you drowsy.

When can I start moving?

After your surgery and provided your pain is controlled, your Nurse will assess if you are ready to get up and move. It's important to stay active and mobile because it keeps your muscles strong, stops clots from forming in your blood, prevents lung infections and improves your bowel function.

Who will look after my epidural?

Your Nurse will check on you often to look for any of the mentioned side effects. Part of their routine is to:

- ask you about your pain levels to make sure you are comfortable
- check your vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, heart rate, oxygen levels)
- check the area on your back at the epidural site to look for any swelling or leaking
- test your arms and legs to ensure you are able to move
- test your sensations of hot, cold, sharp and dull

These tests may be done often if the dose of your epidural pain medication is being changed. An Anesthetist will be available if any changes in your medicine need to be made and can be called by your Nurse.

How long does the epidural stay in? How will the epidural be removed?

Your epidural can stay in for 3-5 days but can remain in longer for some people.

- Once your pain is well controlled and you are ready to try eating, drinking, and moving around your epidural can be removed.
- Your epidural pain medication will be slowly reduced and you will be given pain medication by mouth and through injections instead.
- The nursing team will be responsible for removing your epidural catheter.

What happens after the epidural comes out?

A bandage will go over the site and the nurse will check for: signs of infection (fever, swelling at the bandage site), pain, bleeding or leaking at the bandage site, changes in your bowel or bladder habits and numbness or weakness in your legs and feet.

Make sure to tell your Nurse if you are having any of these symptoms