

Patient Information

Epidural Anaesthetic

Acute Pain Team

This leaflet has been made using information from the **Royal College of Anaesthetists** information booklets, which were written by patients, patient representatives and anaesthetists, working together.

This leaflet gives you information about pain relief with an epidural after your operation

It's much easier to relieve pain before it gets severe. It's best to ask for pain relief as soon as you feel pain and continue the treatment regularly.

Is a spinal the same as an epidural?

No. Although they both involve an injection of local anaesthetic between the bones of the spine, the injections work in a slightly different way

How does the epidural work?

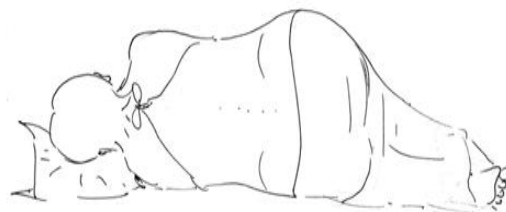
Your anaesthetist passes a very small plastic tube (catheter) into the space around the spinal cord in your back. This is called the epidural space. Medicine is given continuously through this tube using a pump numbing the nerves that transmit pain signals to the brain.

When is an epidural anaesthetic used?

As an alternative to a general anaesthetic for some operations. Depending on the type of operation and your own medical condition, it may sometimes be safer for you than a general anaesthetic.

How is an epidural done?

1. Epidurals are usually put in when you are conscious. Sometimes sedation can be used.
2. A needle will be used to put a thin plastic tube (a 'cannula') into a vein in your hand or arm for giving fluids (a 'drip'). You will either sit on the side of the bed with your feet on a low stool or lie on your side, curled up with your knees tucked up towards your chest.
3. Before the injection is administered, the skin is numbed
4. A thin plastic catheter is passed through a needle into your epidural space. The needle is then removed, leaving only the catheter in your back.
5. The tube is then secured in place with a clear sticky plastic dressing



What will I feel while the epidural or spinal is being done?

Usually having an epidural should not be too uncomfortable or take more than a few minutes to perform.

1. The local anaesthetic stings briefly, but usually allow an almost painless procedure.
2. It is common to feel slight discomfort in your back as the needle or catheter is inserted.
3. Occasionally, an electric shock-like sensation or pain occurs during needle or catheter insertion. If this happens, try to stay still and tell your anaesthetist immediately.

4. A sensation of warmth and numbness gradually develops. You may still be able to feel touch, pressure and movement.

Care when an epidural catheter has been left in place for pain relief_

At regular intervals, the nurses will take your pulse and blood pressure and ask you about your pain and how you are feeling. They will also check the movement in your arms and legs, look at your back where the epidural is inserted and test how it is working by using a cold spray on your skin

The pain relief nurses will visit you to check that your epidural is working properly.

Can anyone have an epidural?

No, an epidural may not always be possible if the risk of complications is too high.

The anaesthetist will ask you if:

1. you are taking blood thinning drugs, such as Warfarin & Clopidogrel.
2. you have a blood clotting abnormality
3. you have an allergy to local anaesthetics
4. you have severe arthritis or deformity of the spine
5. you have an infection in your back

Side effects and complications

Common

1. Unable to pass urine. The epidural or spinal affects the nerves that supply the bladder, so a catheter (tube) may be inserted to drain the urine away. Bladder function returns to normal after the epidural wears off
2. Low blood pressure.
3. Itching.
4. Feeling sick and vomiting.
5. Pain, backache and/or bruising at injection site
6. Unsatisfactory pain relief – the epidural can be changed, or other methods of pain relief are available if your epidural fails.

Rare

7. Occasionally a severe headache occurs after an epidural because the lining space surrounding the spinal cord has been accidentally punctured (a 'dural tap').
8. permanent nerve damage
9. epidural abscess (infection) or epidural haematoma (blood clot)

In the unlikely event that you experience persistent tingling, heaviness or weakness in your legs after the epidural has worn off or you have an increasing pain in your back, whilst in hospital inform the ward nurse immediately so they can contact a doctor or the acute pain team to review you as soon as possible. If you have been discharged home contact your GP immediately.

If you have any side effects report these to your nurse as they can all be treated. You can discuss these risks with your anaesthetist; they can give you more detailed information.

When will the epidural be stopped?

Most patients have their epidural running for 24-72 hours. After this time, the infusion will be stopped and removed. You will continue to receive other methods of pain relief.

Acute Pain Nurses

Are available Monday to Friday 8—4, they will come to see you after the operation if you have an epidural or are having problems controlling your pain.

Further information is available from;

Acute Pain Specialist Nurse – sath.pain.nurses@nhs.net

Royal College of Anaesthetists – Website: www.rcoa.ac.uk/patientinfo

Patient Advise and Liaison Service (PALS)

We act on your behalf when handling patient and family concerns, liaising with staff, managers and where appropriate, relevant organisations to negotiate immediate or prompt solutions. We can also help you get support from other local or national agencies.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Tel: 0800 783 0057 or 01743 261691

Princess Royal Hospital, Tel: 01952 282888

Other Sources of Information

NHS 111

A fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Telephone: 111 (free from a landline or mobile)

Website: www.nhs.uk

Patient UK

Provides leaflets on health and disease translated into 11 other languages as well as links to national support/self-help groups and a directory of UK health websites.

Website: www.patient.info

Website: www.sath.nhs.uk

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