

Patient Information

Spinal 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 following a spinal anaesthetic.

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.

What is a spinal?

A spinal is a “one off” injection that puts local anaesthetic close to the nerves (blocking pain signals and reducing pain), within the fluid that surrounds the spinal cord. The numbing effect lasts for about 1½ to 4 hours.

When is a spinal 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.

Do I have to stay awake?

Before the operation you can decide with your anaesthetist whether you remain fully awake or lightly sedated. A screen is positioned so that you cannot see the operation.

How is a spinal done?

1. 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.
2. Before the injection is administered, the skin is numbed.
3. Then local anaesthetic is injected into your back and the needle removed.



What will I feel while the spinal is being done?

Usually having a spinal 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, like the sensation after a dental anaesthetic injection. You may still be able to feel touch, pressure and movement.
5. With a spinal your legs feel heavy and become increasingly difficult to move.

Can anyone have a spinal?

No, your anaesthetist will ask you if:

- a) you are taking blood thinning drugs, such as Warfarin, Clopidogrel.
- b) you have a blood clotting abnormality.
- c) you have an allergy to local anaesthetics.
- d) you have severe arthritis or deformity of the spine.
- e) you have an infection in your back.

Care after an operation with a spinal

1. Your nurses will make sure that the numb area is protected from pressure and injury until sensation returns.
2. It takes 1.5 – 4 hours for feeling to return to the area of your body that is numb. You should tell the staff about any concerns or worries you may have.
3. As sensation returns, you may experience some tingling in the skin as the spinal wears off. At this point you may become aware of some pain from the operation site and you should ask for more pain relief before the pain becomes too severe.
4. As the spinal wears off, please ask for help when you first get out of bed.

Side effects and complications

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 - other pain relief will be available if your spinal does not work.
7. Temporary/permanent nerve damage.
8. Headache.

You can discuss these risks with your anaesthetist, they can give you more detailed information.

If you have any side effects report these to your nurse as they can all be treated.

Acute Pain Nurses

Are available Monday to Friday 8am till 4pm, they will come to see you after the operation if you 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 Advice 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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