



EPIDURAL INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS OF CENTER FOR SPORTS MEDICINE AND ORTHOPAEDICS

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What is an epidural?: An epidural steroid injection is a simple procedure designed to alleviate acute or chronic pain, particularly due to nerve impingement or irritation. A small amount of steroid is injected into the back (neck, midback, or low back) into the epidural space (the space between the bag of fluid that holds your nerves and the spinal canal). Two main medications are administered: 1) a small amount of numbing medication, which is a local anesthetic (**diagnostic, short term relief**) and 2) a small amount of steroid (**therapeutic, hopefully long-term relief**).

How long will this help me?: The duration of relief varies depending on the patient and the treatment. **There is no average duration we can provide. Injections with steroids can take up to 5-7 days for significant effect to be noticed, but you may notice benefit right away due to local anesthetics like lidocaine.** The decision for this injection was made based on your history, exam, and imaging, such as an MRI. There are two main medications administered: a local anesthetic, which numbs the nerve and is short acting, and a steroid which is long acting. If the relief is temporary, it has a **diagnostic** benefit. If it is long term, it has a **therapeutic** benefit. **Knowing how much this helps you, even if very short lived, is very useful for your care.**

How is an epidural performed (steps)?:

- 1) The patient gets on the exam table (on your stomach)
- 2) The back is cleaned with antiseptic medication
- 3) An x-ray machine is used to identify the correct place
- 4) Lidocaine is injected to numb the skin
- 5) A small needle is advanced to the correct position
- 6) Contrast dye (a small amount) is used to ensure the medication is being delivered to the correct place
- 7) The steroid injection is administered
- 8) The needle is removed
- 9) We monitor patients for five minutes before discharge

How long does the procedure take?: Usually between 2-5 minutes.

How much pain will this cause?: This is typically not a very painful procedure.

What should I do during the procedure?:

- **You will need to lay flat on your stomach during the entire procedure.**
- **Please DO NOT move during the procedure: please let us know if you are in significant pain.** Motion will affect the live x-ray images and can be dangerous while a needle is being placed. Please remain still at all times. (If you are unable to lay flat on your stomach or do not believe you can lay still, we recommend choosing to have your injection done at the surgery center).



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- **The site of the injection will be cleaned off with a sterile solution before the injection. Please DO NOT touch near the area that is being cleaned as that would contaminate the area.** A plan is already made of where needle is being placed based off MRI results, history and exam at the time of your last office visit.

What are potential complications?: Serious complications are **extremely** rare, but can include bleeding, infection, allergic reaction, neurological injury, death etc. Other complications can include the procedure not being helpful, a spinal fluid leak/post dural puncture headache, temporary weakness or numbness etc.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE, WHAT ARE REASONS I SHOULD CANCEL?:

- 1) **Active Infection:** If you are prescribed antibiotics, have a fever, are unwell etc. — **CALL THE CLINIC TO SEE IF THE PROCEDURE NEEDS TO BE RESCHEDULED. THE PROCEDURE WILL NOT BE PERFORMED IF YOU HAVE AN ACTIVE INFECTION.**
- 2) **Blood thinners:** If you were instructed to stop blood thinners and forgot to stop, or **if you have recently been prescribed blood thinners** — **CALL THE CLINIC TO SEE IF THE PROCEDURE NEEDS TO BE RESCHEDULED. THE PROCEDURE WILL NOT BE PERFORMED IF YOU WERE INSTRUCTED TO STOP YOUR BLOOD THINNERS.**
- 3) You no longer have pain.

ACTIVITY RESTRICTIONS:

- **Do not submerge in water for two days (i.e. pool, bath, hot tub)- you may shower.**
- **You may perform light duties immediately after your procedure and resume your usual pre-procedure activities the following day. Don't do activities you have not recently performed.**
- **Do not drive for the rest of the day.**

SITE CARE: You may remove the band aid 2 hours after the injection **and resume your normal hygiene care.**

Other Important Information:

- 1) **Numbness:** Lidocaine or other anesthetics are often used in conjunction with steroids – this may cause temporary numbness in the surrounding area for several hours.
- 2) **Pain:** You may experience pain or a burning sensation at or about the injection site or muscular spasm. To help alleviate the discomfort you can apply an ice pack to the area for the first 2 to 3 days (maximum 20 minutes at a time with a 40-minute rest period). Afterwards, if symptoms persist, just apply moist or dry heat.
- 3) **Allergic Reactions:** Although rare, they do occur. Most reactions are mild and resolved within 24 hours. If you have any type of allergic reaction, (i.e. rash, redness, or swelling), please contact our office as soon as



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possible. If you notice facial swelling or have difficulty breathing, please go to the nearest Emergency Room for further evaluation.

4) Depigmentation and Steroid Divots: A small percentage of patients who receive steroid injections may experience depigmentation – a loss of the normal skin tone color near the injection site. This normally resolves within one year. A small skin divot (skin or fat atrophy) can also occur, which typically resolves.

5) Headache: Patients who receive injections around the spine will occasionally experience a spinal headache from a spinal fluid leak. These headaches are usually temporary and typically relieved by common headache relief measures, including taking Tylenol or ibuprofen, increasing fluid intake (especially caffeine drinks) and lying flat. **These headaches are not common and are usually very pronounced.**

6) Blood Thinners:

- NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, meloxicam, etc.): Safe to take, except for any aspirin containing product.
- Blood thinners/anticoagulants (Plavix, Eliquis, Aspirin, etc.): Resume 24 hours after injection.

Note on the Surgery Center:

- **If you elect to have the procedure done at the surgery center, YOU WILL NOT BE PUT TO SLEEP.** You will receive **conscious sedation** so your procedure is more comfortable. We do not put people to sleep (monitored anesthesia care, general anesthesia, or “twilight”) for these procedures.

PLEASE NOTIFY THE OFFICE AT (423) 624-2696 IMMEDIATELY IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING, ALL OF WHICH ARE EXTREMELY RARE AND VERY UNLIKELY:

- Excessive swelling at the injection site.
- Chills, fever, drainage, bleeding at site.
- Weakness or loss of use of extremities.
- New weakness or loss of control of bladder or bowels.
- Headache unrelieved by the above measures.

IF YOU ARE NOT CONTACTED, PLEASE GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM

This information sheet was designed for patients but is not by any means exhaustive on this subject, and we encourage you to forward any further questions to your provider.