

Pain Service

Epidural Injections

What is an epidural injection?

An epidural injection is one method that is used to aid pain management.

An epidural is an injection into an area of your back that surrounds the spinal cord. Local anaesthetic and steroid will be injected. This will bathe the nerve roots which may send pain signals.

Epidural injections can be given anywhere along the length of the spine. This may be in the neck (cervical), ribs (thoracic), lower back (lumbar), or tailbone (caudal).

Before the procedure

- Treatment takes place as an outpatient at the Ely day Surgery Unit or Addenbrookes Pain Clinic Treatment Room.
- Your stay may be around two to four hours. Before any treatment begins you will be asked to provide assurance that someone is able to drive you home if you after your injections.
- You will have a morning or an afternoon appointment.
- Your doctor will discuss the procedure with you and ask you to sign a consent form.
- You will be asked to undress and change into a theatre gown and your blood pressure and pulse will be recorded.

The procedure

This information leaflet is to be read in conjunction with the leaflet titled 'Advice to be read before your Pain Clinic injection treatment'.

- You may have a small needle (Cannula) placed in the back of your hand. This allows the doctor to give you sedation if necessary.
- Once you are lying in the correct position, the doctor will clean your back with an antiseptic solution which can feel very cold.
- The procedure will be carried out under x-ray screening.
- Local anaesthetic is injected into your back which may sting at first, but the area will soon go numb. When the epidural injection takes place you may feel a pushing sensation or some discomfort.

- Contrast (a solution which shows up under x-ray) is injected to make sure that the needle is in the correct position.
- Drugs can then be injected and a feeling of tightness may be felt. A cold spray may be used over the injection site once the procedure is completed.

After the injection

- After the procedure you will be taken to the recovery area where the nursing staff will observe you.
- You may feel a little drowsy and wish to sleep.
- You will lie flat for about 30 minutes and then be assisted to sit up and offered light refreshment.
- Your blood pressure and pulse will be checked frequently.
- You will be advised when to get dressed and will be given advice and a discharge leaflet when you are ready to go home.

Please ensure that you have arranged for someone to drive you home after this procedure. Failure to do so will result in your procedure being cancelled.

If you have had sedation, we recommend that you arrange for someone to stay with you overnight and that you do not drive for 24 hours.

Possible side effects/risks

- Unfortunately, no procedure is risk free.
- Although long term side effects and complications are uncommon, they can occur.
- Not all nerves in the epidural space carry pain messages. Some nerves carry instructions to the leg muscles. If these nerves are numbed then your legs could temporarily become heavy or weak.
- Also, you may be unaware of the need to pass urine; this will be temporary.
- You may have mild local tenderness at the site of the injection, which will usually settle over the next few days.
- Sometimes after the procedure your blood pressure can fall and you may feel faint.
- On rare occasions during insertion of the epidural needle, the layer beneath the epidural space gets punctured. You may then get a headache
- **If a severe headache does develop following your injection, take some paracetamol, drink plenty of water and lay flat. If the headache continues for more than 24 hours please contact your GP or the pain clinic.**
- Other risks could include an increase in pain, infection, bruising, bleeding or nerve damage

What to expect afterwards

- You may experience some soreness or ache from the injection site.
- Some people find that their pain initially feels worse for a few days (pain flare up) before it then settles.
- Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal.
- Try to keep on the move about the house but do not do anything too strenuous.
- As your pain decreases you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming on your back will help to improve your muscle tone and strengthen your back. The best way is to increase your activity slowly.
- Try not to overdo things on a good day so that you end up paying for it with more pain the following day.

Follow up

A letter will be sent to your GP and one of the nurses will telephone you in approximately four weeks.

Points to remember

- Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading
- Always bring a list of all current medication.
- Continue taking all your usual medication on treatment day.
- If there is any possibility you may be pregnant please inform the doctor or nurse.

Additional information

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. If you require more information or have any questions please speak to your doctor or contact the Pain Clinic.

Telephone number: 01223 217796



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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Department	Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ www.cuh.org.uk
Contact number	01223 217796
Publish/Review date	January 2011/January 2014 (minor amendment made September 2011)
File name	Epidural_injections
Version number/Ref	4/PIN1284