

# Epidural for Pain Control After Surgery

This Fact Sheet is for information only, and is for surgery patients who may be receiving an epidural. Please ask an Anesthesiologist if you have any questions.

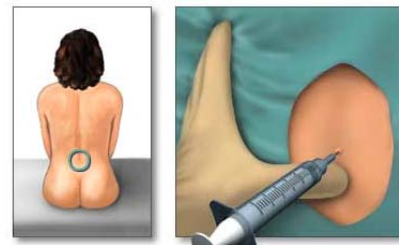


## What is an epidural?

- Pain medications are an important part of your recovery, and can help you heal faster with fewer complications.
- An epidural is one way of giving medication to reduce pain after your surgery.
- If you are having an epidural to control pain, an Anesthesiologist will insert a small tube into your back between the bones of your spine. This tube is called an epidural catheter.
- Pain medication flows through the tube and blocks pain in the nerves of the spine.
- It takes about 20 minutes to insert the tube.
- Not all patients can have epidurals. Some medical conditions make the procedure risky or impossible.

## Before you get the epidural:

- The Anesthesiologist will ask you detailed questions about your health, and perform a physical examination. If you and your Anesthesiologist determine that an epidural is the right choice for you, you will be asked to give consent prior to the epidural procedure.
- You will be given an intravenous (IV) to give you fluid.
- You will have to sit in a position that will allow insertion of the epidural



## What are the advantages of an epidural?

- It is an excellent form of pain control.
- It reduces the need for oral or intravenous medications that may cause nausea or constipation.

## What are the risks of an epidural?

- No pain relief medications delivered via an epidural are completely risk free.
- Most patients, however, do not suffer serious side effects or complications.
- It is important to review the information on risks (on the back of this Fact Sheet) and ask an Anesthesiologist if you have any questions.

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## Common Side Effects

- Pain and bruising where the epidural was inserted
- Temporary difficulty in passing urine. All patients with an epidural receive a urinary catheter to help them urinate.
- Temporary leg weakness
- Inadequate pain control (1 in 7 patients) which may require:
  - extra medication through the epidural
  - removing and putting the epidural in a different location
  - extra intravenous medications

## Uncommon Side Effects

- Significant drop in blood pressure (1 in 50 patients)
- Severe headache (1 in 100 patients)

## Rare Complications

- Temporary nerve damage (such as leg weakness or a numb patch on your leg/foot) (1 in 1000 patients)
- A higher than expected spread of medication which can affect breathing muscles (1 in 13,000 patients)

## Very Rare Complications

- Epidural infection (1 in 50,000 patients)
- Meningitis (1 in 100,000 patients)
- Accidental unconsciousness (1 in 100,000 patients)
- Blood clot with spinal cord damage (1 in 170,000 patients)
- Permanent nerve damage with possible paralysis (1 in 250,000 patients)

**For more information, speak with your Anesthesiologist.**

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Notes: