

There have been some very rare reactions to epidurals that have resulted in serious nerve damage. These are **very** unlikely, with only one case occurring in many thousands. But this does show that these injections should not be done without careful thought.

What will I feel when I have the injection?

In most cases the injection can be done while you are sitting or lying on your bed. It usually takes about 10 minutes. Your back is cleaned with some cold antiseptic. The first injection of local (numbing) anaesthetic will sting, but this only lasts for a few seconds. The main injection will sometimes cause some discomfort but this does not last for long. You will rest afterwards and any discomfort should settle quickly.

Do I have to stay in hospital?

In most cases this injection can be done in a morning or afternoon. You will only need to stay a few hours. Rarely, people can feel faint or have a headache that may mean they need to stay in hospital overnight.

Will I need someone with me?

You will need a responsible adult to bring you to the hospital, drive you home (you should not drive on the same day) and stay with you overnight. **If this is difficult you must tell us in advance.**

What should I do after the injection?

You should take things easy on the day of the epidural injection. You will need to rest before and after going home. You should not plan to do anything important that day.

On the next day, you should be able to do normal activities. It is important that you do not stop doing things and get stiff! You should not need to take more than two days off work. Many people can go back to work the following day.

Produced by:
The Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
Heath Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 5PD
Hospital switchboard: 01473 712233
www.ipswichhospital.nhs.uk

Your Epidural Injection

Pain Management Unit
Tel: 01473 703435

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This information leaflet is designed to give you some answers to questions you may have about your injection, but it is not a substitute for talking directly to your doctor or nurse. If you have any doubts or worries about your treatment, please speak to the nursing or medical staff.

What is an epidural injection?

It is an injection into your spine that can be at any point: lower back, upper back or neck. Your doctor will have already told you the place on your back where you will have the injection.

The injection goes into the space inside the spine, close to the nerves that are causing your pain.

Will the injection cure me?

The injection will hopefully help reduce your pain, but a cure is unlikely. There are several different causes of pain but epidurals for long-term pain are usually done to help reduce nerve irritability.

The nerves may be irritable for various reasons. One of the most common causes is a disc problem. The injection may help the pain, allowing the original disc problem to settle down, but it is not a cure. There are many similar problems which can cause pain.

Unfortunately, no treatment is guaranteed to reduce the pain, but we think that the epidural injection stands a good chance of helping you.

How long will the injection last?

Unfortunately, we cannot predict this as everyone's pain is different. If it does help it usually takes a couple of days to have an effect. A very good effect will last several months and will allow the original problem to settle down, but this is not guaranteed; some people will not get any benefit at all.

Will any illness or drugs I am taking affect the injection?

You will already have discussed your general health with your doctor before deciding on the epidural injection, but sometimes things can change. If you have any problems that make you bruise or bleed easily, or if you are taking drugs to thin your blood, such as warfarin, you must tell the doctor.

Likewise, an infection may mean that the injection should be delayed until you are better.

Must I do anything special beforehand?

You can eat and drink as normal and have a light meal before coming to hospital for your injection.

Make sure that you bring a list of any tablets or other medication that you are taking, as well as information about any allergies you may have.

What will be injected?

The first injection will be into the skin on your back. It is standard local anaesthetic called lidocaine, which is similar to the numbing injection dentists use.

The injection into your epidural space is usually a steroid (your doctor will confirm this with you). It is designed to reduce irritability in nerves and other tissues. It is not the same steroid that body builders use (anabolic steroid).

What are the side effects?

Most medical treatments have unwanted effects, and epidurals are no exception. The most common side effect is backache from the injection, due to minor bruising, which lasts a few days. Unpleasant headache can occur in about one in 100 cases. If a headache persists there are treatments that can help.

Steroids can have side effects if overused, such as weight gain, muscle weakness and osteoporosis (bone weakness). These do not occur at the doses used for epidurals, but it is why we cannot give a patient these injections repeatedly.

Although there are many research papers that show the safety of epidurals, steroids are not licensed for this use. This means the manufacturer of the steroid drug does not officially recommend it being given by an epidural injection. However, your doctor and official bodies such as The Pain Society are satisfied that this treatment is safe if properly carried out.