

What is an Epidural Steroid Injection (ESI)?

Many spinal conditions, including a herniated disc and spinal stenosis, can cause inflammation and pressure on the nerves leading out of the spine and spinal cord. This results in pain, numbness, or tingling along the distribution of the nerve (i.e. hip pain, knee pain, leg pain). If the issue is in the neck, this can cause the same symptoms, but in the neck, shoulders, arms, or hands.

An epidural steroid injection (ESI) may be used to reduce the inflammation surrounding the spinal nerves. These can be done in the cervical (neck), thoracic (mid-back), and lumbar (low back) spine.

These injections are performed by physiatrists or orthopedic surgeons. During the procedure, the patient lies down on their stomach. If the injection is being done in the low back, sometimes a pillow is placed under the stomach to open up the spine and allow more space for the needle to pass through.

First, a local anesthetic is used to numb the skin and surrounding tissues above the injection site. Using x-ray guidance, the needle is guided into the epidural space. Contrast dye is injected to confirm the correct placement of the needle in the spine.

The injection itself may include local anesthetic and saline along with the steroid medication. This may assist with immediate pain relief and flushing the area of inflammatory agents. The mixture is injected and the steroid acts to reduce the inflammation around the spinal nerve roots.

Finally, the needle is removed, and a small bandage is placed on the injection site. The patient is monitored for a short time and then discharged home. Most people can resume normal activities the next day. It is required that patients have a driver to take them home after the procedure.

Most patients generally get relief within the first week following an injection. Generally, most people will need to complete a series of three injections to get the full benefit. After your first injection, you will be scheduled for a follow up to assess your results and relief from the injection. After discussion with your provider, you may be scheduled for repeat injections.