

WHAT IS AN EPIDURAL INJECTION?

Epidural injections have been employed in the management of patients with cervical, thoracic, and lumbar radicular (pain radiating to lower extremity) pain for almost a century. An epidural injection is a term applying to a variety of techniques performed to deliver a corticosteroid preparation into the epidural and perineural spaces of the spine. Three routes may be used in the spine: caudal, intralaminar, and transforaminal. All procedures are done with fluoroscopic guidance.

WHY AN EPIDURAL INJECTION?

The primary indication for an epidural steroid injection is thought to be relief of pain due to inflammation of the nerve elements in the epidural spaces of the spine. The reason to perform the epidural is lack of response to conservative care or a diagnostic need to determine the spinal source for the symptoms. The reason to assume the risks associated with an epidural and consider it, is that the pain has not improved despite treatment or gains in pain improvement have not been made or have remained stagnant. The whole point of performing an injection is to place the medication as close to the pathologic process as possible in order to gain the best possible therapeutic benefit.

HOW DO EPIDURAL INJECTIONS WORK?

Spinal injection procedures are completed with you lying face down on an x-ray table. We will ensure that you are comfortable as possible. The skin in the low back area is cleaned and then numbed with a local anesthetic similar to what a dentist uses. The skin in the low back area is cleaned and then numbed with a local anesthetic similar to what a dentist uses. Using fluoroscopy (live X-ray) for guidance, a needle is inserted into the skin and directed toward the epidural space.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- Severe infections are rare, occurring in 0.1% to 0.01% of injections.
- A dural puncture occurs in 0.5% of injections. It may cause a post-dural puncture headache (also called a spinal headache) that usually improves within a few days. Although infrequent, a blood patch may be necessary to alleviate the headache.
- Bleeding is a rare complication and is more common for patients with underlying bleeding disorders.
- While extremely rare, nerve damage can occur from direct trauma from the needle, or from infection or bleeding.

