

Epidural Steroid Injection

- **What is an epidural injection?**

The epidural space is located along the entire line of the spinal canal one layer superficial to the spinal fluid. Medication such as corticosteroids and or local anesthetic is injected in the epidural space by the way of a needle or catheter (small tube).

- **What is the purpose of Epidural Steroid Injections?**

The corticosteroid injected reduces the inflammation and / or swelling of nerves in the Epidural space. This may in turn reduce pain, tingling, numbness, and other symptoms caused by nerve inflammation / irritation or swelling.

- **What sort of conditions are epidural steroid injections used to treat pain?**

Epidural steroid injections are used to treat conditions that affect the spine from the neck to the lower back. These conditions include herniated discs, protruding discs, degenerated disc, osteoarthritis of the spine, spinal stenosis, and scar tissue or other changes following neck or lower back surgery. Patient complaints include pain in the neck, shoulder, middle or low back, arms, or legs. Patients may also have complaints of numbness or weakness in the extremities.

- **How is the injection performed? Will the injection hurt?**

The procedure involves inserting a needle through skin and deeper tissues so there is some discomfort involved. The doctor will use a local anesthetic (“numb”) using a very thin needle prior to inserting the Epidural needle. Also, the tissues in the midline have less nerve supply, so usually you feel strong pressure and not much pain. The procedure is done with the patient sitting up or lying on his / her side. If the procedure is done under fluoroscopy – the patient will be placed on his / her stomach. The skin in the back is cleaned with antiseptic solution and then the injection is carried out. After the injection, you are placed on your back or on your side.

- **What are the side effects and risks associated with epidural injections?**

Most patients will experience some injection site tenderness for 1 – 3 days following the injection. This can be remedied with an ice pack on the injection site immediately following the procedure, and heat if the pain persists after 24 hours. Headaches may occur if the needle enters the spinal fluid. Diabetics may notice an increase in their blood sugars. Other side effects can include water retention, infection, bleeding inside the Epidural space with nerve damage, and worsening of symptoms.

- **How long does it take for the injection to work?**

Immediately after the injection, you may notice that your pain may be gone or quite less. This is due to the local anesthetic injected. This will last only a few hours. Your pain will return and you may have a “sore back” for a day or two. It usually takes 1 – 3 days for the corticosteroids to have their effect. However, some patients take up to seven days to notice the full effect. Most patients experience partial relief after the first injection. Subsequent injections are performed to increase the degree of pain relief.

- **How long does the pain relief last?**

The injected depo – corticosteroids are fat-soluble and generally are active for about one month. However the clinical relief depends on several factors. The most important is the nature of the patient’s condition. In some cases, healing after injury may take 6 months to one year. In other cases, the condition is chronic and injections may be needed on an intermittent basis (up to three times a year). Patients are encouraged to go through physical therapy for strengthening exercises during the period of time when the pain has been reduced.

- **What about physical therapy?**

Physical therapy and rehabilitation is essential in treating many patients with spinal conditions. By making the muscles around a spine into a “muscular corset” loads can be reduced on the nerves, disks, and joints of the spine. One of the major goals of the epidural steroid injection is to reduce pain and allow the patient to participate more effectively in physical therapy.

- **What if I don’t get any relief from the epidural injections?**

If you do not receive benefit from the epidural injection, other structures may be responsible for your pain. This could include the disk, joints, ligaments, or muscles surrounding the spine. You may require further imaging studies or other diagnostic injections to better identify and treat the source of your pain.