



Epidural Steroid Injection Patient Education

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WHAT IS AN EPIDURAL STEROID INJECTION?

An epidural injection is an injection of steroid into the epidural space. The epidural space is a space located in the spine between the vertebrae and the dural sac, which surrounds the spinal cord. Theoretically, the steroid reduces the inflammation of the nerve roots as they exit the spine, which can help alleviate pain in the neck, back, and/or limbs. The epidural space can be accessed via three approaches (interlaminar, transforaminal, or caudal), depending on what structure(s) the physician is trying to target.

HOW IS THE PROCEDURE PERFORMED?

The patient lies on his/her stomach or back depending on which body region is being targeted. The skin of the back or neck is cleansed with antiseptic solution and a sterile field is created. Local anesthetic is used to numb the skin and underlying soft tissues. Under X-ray guidance (fluoroscopy), a needle is advanced into the epidural space. A small amount of contrast dye is injected to ensure accurate needle placement, then a combination of local anesthetic and steroid is injected into the epidural space. The injection takes about 5-10 minutes to complete.

HOW LONG DOES THE EFFECT LAST?

The effect might last a few hours to a few weeks or much longer. Depending on the approach, pain relief in the first couple of hours after the injection may be the most important as this tells us if our diagnosis is likely correct. Once the effect of the local anesthetic wears off in a few hours, the steroid will take effect in 3-10 days. If the symptoms do return, we will discuss options available for continued pain relief, which may include repeating the injection for additive benefit.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP AFTER THE INJECTION?

If the injection is being performed for diagnostic information, you will be given a pain log to record how much pain relief you experience on the day of injection. You will be given instructions on how to return the pain log to Dr. Michalik's office. This will help us to measure your response to the injection and determine the next most appropriate step in your care.

If the injection is being performed for therapeutic benefit, you will be instructed to schedule a follow-up with Dr. Michalik in approximately 2 weeks to discuss the benefit of the injection and whether or not there needs to be adjustments to your treatment plan.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND SIDE EFFECTS?

Serious side effects and complications are rare. The most common problem after the injection is having slightly increased pain in the area of the injection for up to a few days. The other potential complications are infection, bleeding and nerve injury. These complications are

minimized by stopping blood thinners in certain situations, using sterile technique, and fluoroscopic (x-ray) needle guidance. Some individuals may temporarily develop headaches, facial flushing, higher than normal blood pressure, and high blood sugar as a result of the steroid, all of which typically resolve within a few days.