

Spinal and Epidural Anaesthesia

Information for radiation therapy patients

What is spinal anaesthesia?

An anaesthetic that is injected directly into the nerves of your spine. This numbs your nerves to give pain relief and limit movement in certain areas of your body.

Your anaesthetist will make sure that the anaesthetic is working before your procedure starts. The effects should last 1-4 hours.

After your procedure, your healthcare team will help you in your recovery, making sure all feeling and movement has returned.

What is an epidural?

An epidural requires a nerve catheter (thin plastic tube) to be inserted into the space around your spinal nerves to deliver continuous anaesthetic over a longer period of time.

Recovery from an epidural will depend on when the anaesthetic is stopped and when the catheter is removed. This anaesthetic will affect the movement and feeling in your legs while you recover.

What is an epidural block?

An epidural block allows local anaesthetic to be placed near the nerves in your back. Once you are anaesthetised (asleep), a needle is inserted between two back bones and into the epidural space. Medicine is administered into this space via a tiny tube.

What are the benefits of an epidural?

- Less anaesthesia is needed during the procedure so you should have a faster and safer recovery.
- Epidurals usually provide better pain management, so you should be able to move and breathe easier.

What should I expect?

- **Epidural Catheter:** A tiny plastic tube called a catheter may be placed to allow more local anaesthetic to be given once first the first dose wears off. If this is placed, it is secured with tape then connected to a pump that gives medicine every few hours.
- **Weak legs:** While the block is working, you may have weak legs, but you should still be able to move your legs. If you cannot move at all, please notify your nurse.
- **Numb or tingly legs:** Be careful near hot, cold or sharp items until the block has worn off.
- **Urinary catheter:** While you have an epidural, a urinary catheter may be placed to drain your urine.
- **Bruising:** The skin on your back where the needle was inserted may have a temporary bruise.
- **Discoloured skin:** The skin around the insertion site may be coloured by the cleaning solution. This will wash away with your next bath or shower.

Are there any risks?

Epidurals are usually very safe. Sometimes they need to be removed because they don't work well, and some patients can feel itchy when the epidural is in effect.

Rarely, injury to a nerve can occur. This is not usually permanent, with less than 1 in 100,000 patients experiencing permanent nerve injury.

After your procedure

- Do not walk until feeling returns to your legs
- Once normal feeling returns to your legs, you are safe to resume your normal activities
- Once normal feeling returns to your legs, you are safe to resume your normal activities
- As the anaesthesia starts to wear off you may require pain relief
- Have your support person check the area that the catheter was inserted for redness, swelling or bleeding.
- Do not drink alcohol for 24 hours after your procedure
- If you are going to use public transport within 24 hours after the procedure, make sure you have someone with you
- Do not drive or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours after your procedure
- You will need to pass urine before leaving the hospital.

When to seek further help

- If you experience changes in your ability to think clearly and focus seek medical help immediately
- If you develop new weakness in the legs within 2 weeks of the epidural
- If there is redness, swelling, pain, bleeding or ooze from the area the needle was placed
- If you lose movement and/or feeling to areas where anaesthesia was applied
- If you have ongoing nausea or vomiting
- If you have ongoing headaches, or any loss of consciousness
- If you have any concerns related to your procedure.

If you have any of the above symptoms between 8.00am and 6.00pm, Monday to Friday, please contact the Radiation Department on 4433 1662. Outside of these hours, please present to your local Emergency Department.

Time and date of your epidural/spinal anaesthetic administration:



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