

Epidural Catheter for Pain Control

Patient & Family Information

This pamphlet tells you about the use of an epidural catheter for pain control. If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or doctor.

What is an epidural catheter?

An epidural catheter is a small, soft, thin tube which the anaesthetists places into your back. Through this catheter the doctor or nurse can give medicine into your spine to control your pain.

How does the anaesthetist insert the catheter?

- you lie on your side with your legs bent or you sit up with your upper body bent forward
- your lower back is cleaned with a liquid which reduces germs
- the skin in the area is frozen, and using a needle as a guide, the catheter is put in
- the catheter sits in the epidural space, which is the space just outside your spinal cord

This takes about 15 minutes.

How is the medicine given?

- the medicine is given through the catheter
- the medicine may be given in a small dose every 4 to 12 hours, or by a small pump machine that provides a very small amount of the drug all the time
- the dose you receive will depend on your pain (the dose is based on a person's need)

What are the benefits of an epidural catheter?

- medicine given by this route provides pain control during and after surgery
- smaller doses can be given to provide good pain control
- the medicine works for a longer time with fewer side effects
- better pain control means you can get up, cough and deep breath and move around sooner after your surgery. This leads to fewer problems after surgery and most often a shorter hospital stay.

What are the side effects?

You may:

- have itching on your body
- have trouble passing your urine
- feel nausea (feel sick to your stomach)
- feel drowsy

We can give you medicine to reduce the itching and the nausea.

If you feel drowsy, we will decrease the amount of medicine you are getting.

How long will you have the epidural in place?

The anaesthetist will decide this, but most often it is for 3-4 days.

Does an epidural affect your activity?

This will vary with the medicine given via the epidural catheter. Your nurse will tell you how much activity you can do.

Do not get up without help unless the nurse tells you it's ok.

The catheter will be well taped to your back so you do not need to worry about it coming out.

You are a partner with us in planning your care. Ask questions, and be sure you are clear about how you will manage when you go home.

For general information or if you have any questions and you cannot contact your doctor, please phone:

**HEALTHLink Alberta
1-800-408-5465 (LINK)
Health advice 24 hours a day**