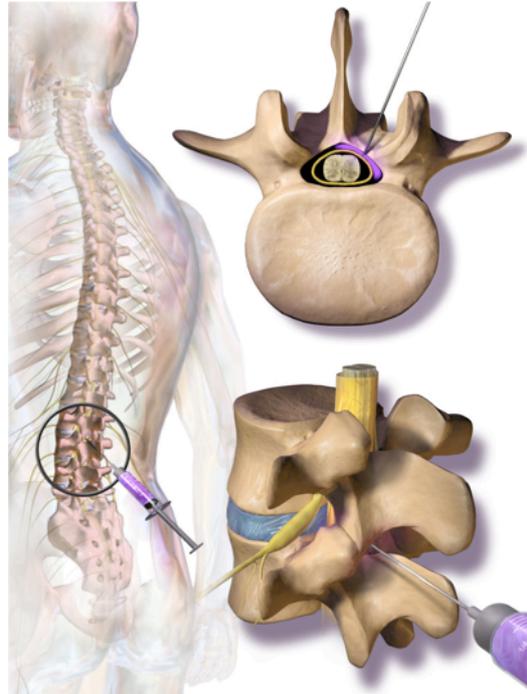




Epidural Injections and Nerve Root Blocks



What is an epidural injection?

An epidural injection involves the injection of a corticosteroid (cortisone) and local anaesthetic into the epidural space of the spine; which is the area between the protective covering (dura) of the spinal cord and the bony vertebrae. The epidural space contains fat, nerve roots and small blood vessels.

This injection is used to reduce the pain associated with conditions such as spinal canal stenosis, spondylosis, herniated disc, degenerative disc or sciatica.

This injection procedure aims to reduce the inflammation of the spinal nerves and therefore reduce your pain to enable you to exercise more easily.

What is a Nerve Root Injection?

A nerve root injection or transforaminal injection involves the injection of a corticosteroid (cortisone) and local anaesthetic into the foramen (channel) from which a spinal nerve exits the spine.

This injection is used to reduce the pain associated with conditions such as spinal herniated disc or foramen narrowing by disc herniation or facet joint hypertrophy.

This injection procedure aims to reduce the inflammation of the nerve root and therefore reduce your pain to enable you to exercise more easily.

How long could the pain relief last after this procedure?

These injections may provide pain relief for several weeks and even months. Sometimes though they only last for a few hours but this can still provide valuable diagnostic information. This procedure does not give permanent pain relief as the effects of the medication do eventually wear off. Adding a pulsed radiofrequency component to the nerve root injection often increases the duration of pain relief (ask your doctor).

Will I be awake during the procedure?

You will be offered sedation. Most people choose to be sedated to avoid. You will likely have little or no memory of the procedure, however this is not guaranteed (especially if a deeper sedation is not safe for you).

Is the procedure painful?

Local anaesthetic (numbing) injections are administered at the start of the procedure. You may experience some discomfort during the procedure.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

Please advise staff if you are:

- Taking blood thinners. These may need to be stopped for some time prior to the procedure.
- Diabetic.
- Pregnant (or any chance of you being pregnant).
- Allergic to iodine, latex, shellfish, local anaesthetics, or anything else.
- Unwell (especially if you have an infection).
- Implanted with a medical device.

Staff may advise you to:

- Avoid eating for 6 hours prior to the procedure (You will be told the exact time to start fasting).
- In most cases it is OK to drink clear fluids until 3 hours prior to your procedure time (e.g. water, clear cordial, black tea).
- Take your usual medications (unless advised otherwise).
- Arrange for someone to accompany you home.

What does the procedure involve?

After arriving and completing the necessary paperwork:

- You will be asked to change into a hospital gown
- If you are having sedation, then you will meet the anaesthetist and he/she will speak with you about the anaesthetic.
- A small cannula (sterile tube) may be inserted into one of your veins.
- You may be given a mild sedative.
- Your heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen levels are monitored throughout the procedure.
- You will lie face-down on an x-ray table, the skin over the area to be injected is cleaned with an antiseptic solution, and sterile drapes applied
- A local anaesthetic may be injected into your skin
- An x-ray machine is used to guide a small needle towards the correct target. X-ray dye (contrast) may be used to confirm the position of the needle.
- The local anaesthetic and/or steroid solution is injected.
- Multiple injections may be required.
- The procedure usually takes 10 to 20 minutes, plus recovery time.

What are the potential complications?

This procedure is generally very safe. However, all invasive procedures carry the risk of complications. In general the risk is low, but includes:

- Discomfort at the site of the injection
- Infection
- Bruising
- Muscle weakness
- Bleeding
- Allergic reaction to the medications.
- Puncture of the dura (the layer surrounding the spinal cord) with subsequent severe, but temporary, headache.
- Failure of the procedure to reduce your pain.
- Extremely rarely there may be permanent damage to nerves or spinal cord resulting in weakness, pain or loss of sensation.
- Steroid-related side effects such as transient flushing, mood swings, high blood sugar levels (especially in diabetic patients). The manufacturer did not specifically design most steroid solutions for this procedure. Despite this, these medications have been widely used, over many years, for this procedure without significant complications.
- Risks of sedation: Please ask your doctor or anaesthetist.

What happens after the procedure?

- You will be monitored in a recovery area until you are ready to go home (usually 60-90 minutes).
- If you have had a sedation, then you need to have someone take you home and stay with you overnight.
- If you have received any sedation during your procedure, the effects of these medications may last for up to 24 hours. You may not remember some of the information given during the procedure. This is a normal side effect of the medication. For the next 24 hours you should not drive a vehicle, drink alcohol, operate machinery, make important decisions, sign legal documents or travel unaccompanied
- Please remove the dressing the day after the procedure, when you next wash.
- The pain may return when the local anaesthetic wears off. Some people experience an initial (temporary) increase in pain and stiffness that may continue for several days. If necessary, an ice pack can be applied to the area, 10 minutes at a time, for 1-2 days following the procedure. You can take simple pain-killers such as paracetamol to help ease any discomfort.
- If steroids are injected then it may take several days for the benefits to be noticed. Additionally, you may feel flushed in the face and/or notice a change in your mood for a few days. Diabetic patients may notice a rise in their blood sugar levels.
- After the procedure, care must be taken to avoid a rapid increase in your activities. Gradually increase your daily activities as tolerated. Discuss this with your doctor.
- You may be given a pain relief chart to fill out. Please keep this handy to refer to when you are phoned by the QPain nurse (within 24-48hrs) to discuss the outcome and to organise any follow up appointments.
- If you have severe pain, or notice any swelling, discharge or bleeding from the site or have any other concerns, please contact QPain, your General Practitioner, or the Emergency Department of your local hospital.

Consent

It is important that you are fully informed before you request to have any procedure. Please discuss with your doctor any questions or concerns that you may have about your procedure or this information sheet.

If you request to have the procedure, you will be asked to sign a consent form that states that you have been informed about the potential benefits, risks, alternatives, and what the most likely course of events are if you do not want to go ahead with the procedure. You can withdraw consent at any stage up to the start of the procedure.



Treating Pain. Improving life.

Phone: **07 3391 7111**

Fax: 07 3112 6885

admin@qpain.com.au

Level 8, St Vincent's Private Hospital Brisbane

411 Main Street, Kangaroo Point

Qld 4169

www.qpain.com.au