

Epidural Steroid Injections

An epidural steroid injection may help alleviate radicular pain felt in either your arm or leg resulting from pressure and irritation on one of the nerves.

What happens during the epidural steroid injection procedure?

Once positioned appropriately by your doctor, a fluoroscope (X-ray guided machine) assists in identifying the specific area to be injected. The area is then cleansed and the skin is numbed. The needle is inserted under X-ray guidance into the epidural space (the small space surrounding the nerves inside the spinal canal). A special X-ray dye will be used to verify that the needle has been correctly placed and that the medication will be delivered to the appropriate site. A long-acting anti-inflammatory steroid and local anesthetic are usually administered and the needle is removed.

What should I expect after an epidural steroid injection?

It may take several days for the medication to quiet down the symptoms. Most patients report relief in 48–72 hours, although in some cases it may take 1 to 2 weeks for you to notice the benefit.

Be aware that the anesthetic will take several hours to wear off. **It is imperative that you have someone drive you home**, as you may experience some temporary loss of sensation and may find your motor coordination a bit awkward or weak. Otherwise, you may resume your regular activities the following day.

Occasionally, epidural steroid injections are administered in a series of “two to three,” depending on your physician’s specific treatment plan for you. Your doctor’s nurse will be able to help you by telephone in determining what your next step should be once your result is apparent. (Typically, this is in 5–7 days following your first injection.)

What are the risks associated with epidural steroid injections?

Epidural steroid injections are commonly administered without problems. Like all injections, there is a very small risk of bleeding, infection, or allergic reaction. Rarely, the spinal sac, which contains the nerves, may be penetrated during a lumbar injection. This rarely may cause headaches. Should you experience one, lie flat in bed and contact your doctor’s office for any further recommendations or treatment.

The steroid medication can cause a temporary increase in blood sugar levels. If you are diabetic, you’ll need to monitor your glucose levels more frequently for 4–5 days following the injection.

You will be asked to report any allergies at the time your injection is scheduled. This information is necessary for your doctor to know in advance. Substitutions or modifications to the medications may be necessary.

On rare occasions, there may be other complications. If you have concerns, you should discuss them with your doctor. You may call (404) 778-7000 if you have any questions.