

Lumbar Epidural Steroid Injections

WHAT IS AN EPIDURAL STEROID INJECTION?

An epidural injection is a procedure that places anti-inflammatory medicine (steroids) into the epidural space in your spine to decrease swelling of the nerve roots. This procedure is intended to reduce the pain in your back and/or legs. The injection will help injured nerve roots heal by reducing inflammation. It may provide permanent relief or provide a period of pain relief for several months while the injury/cause of pain is healing.

WHAT IS THE EPIDURAL SPACE?

The epidural space is an area of fat that surrounds the spinal cord and nerve roots in the spine. Nerves travel through the epidural space to the back and into the legs. Inflammation of these nerve roots may cause pain in these areas due to irritation from a damaged disc or from spinal stenosis (arthritis). The medication (steroid) can be placed into the main epidural space (called an **interlaminar** injection) or into the space surrounding a specific nerve root (called a **transforaminal** or selective nerve root injection).

HOW IS THE PROCEDURE DONE?

The patient is placed on their stomach on our x-ray table. The doctor will mark a spot on the skin using the fluoroscopy (live x-ray) machine. The skin is numbed with lidocaine (numbing medication). Using fluoroscopy for guidance, the physician directs a needle toward the epidural space. The physician uses a small amount of contrast (dye) to verify that the needle is in the correct position, and then injects a long-acting numbing medication (Bupivacaine) and the steroid. An epidural steroid injection usually takes between 15 and 20 minutes to complete. The patient will be observed for approximately 20 minutes after the procedure.

WHAT ARE THE MEDICATIONS USED?

- ChloroPrep (skin cleanser)
- Contrast (“dye”)
- Lidocaine (short-acting numbing med)
- Bupivacaine (long-acting numbing medication)
- Depomedrol (steroid)

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WHAT IS A STEROID?

Steroids (glucocorticoids) occur naturally in your body and are important for a number of bodily functions. Steroids are best known for their very strong anti-inflammatory effect.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT DURING THE PROCEDURE?

Most often, the stinging/burning of the numbing medicine is the most uncomfortable part of the procedure. You may feel some pressure as the medications are injected. Most patients report minimal discomfort during the procedure.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS INVOLVED WITH AN EPIDURAL STEROID INJECTION?

Risks include bleeding, infection, nerve injury, allergic reaction to the medication, and puncture of the spinal sac. The patient may have increased pain for a day or two after the numbing medication wears off. Patients with diabetes may experience short-term elevation of their blood sugar.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT AFTER THE PROCEDURE?

Most patients feel improvement in their pain immediately after the injection due to the anesthetic. However, this immediate pain relief may only be temporary and last for 12-24 hours after the procedure. **The steroid takes three to five days** to start to have an effect in most patients and peaks in about two weeks. Therefore, it may take up to two weeks before the patient feels a change in their pain. Some local tenderness may be experienced for a couple of days after the injection. Using an ice pack three or four times a day for 20 minutes will help reduce tenderness. The patient may take their usual pain medications after the injection.

After this procedure, we recommend no heavy lifting (>10 lbs) or exercise, no prolonged standing or walking (> 20 minutes), and decreased stair climbing and bending for three days after the procedure. This will help your back relax as the steroids are working to decrease the inflammation. **No heat is to be used at the injected area for three days after the procedure.** **No tub bath or soaking in water (i.e. pool, jacuzzi, etc.) for 24 hours.**

FOR WHAT REASONS SHOULD THE PATIENT CALL THE RADIOLOGIST AFTER THE INJECTION?

If the patient experiences severe back pain, new numbness or weakness in their legs, loss of control of their bladder or bowels, or signs of infection in the area of the injection, the patient should call right away at (804) 237-6619.