

# Epidural Analgesia (For Pain Relief)

## Epidural

An epidural is a procedure used to control your pain after surgery.

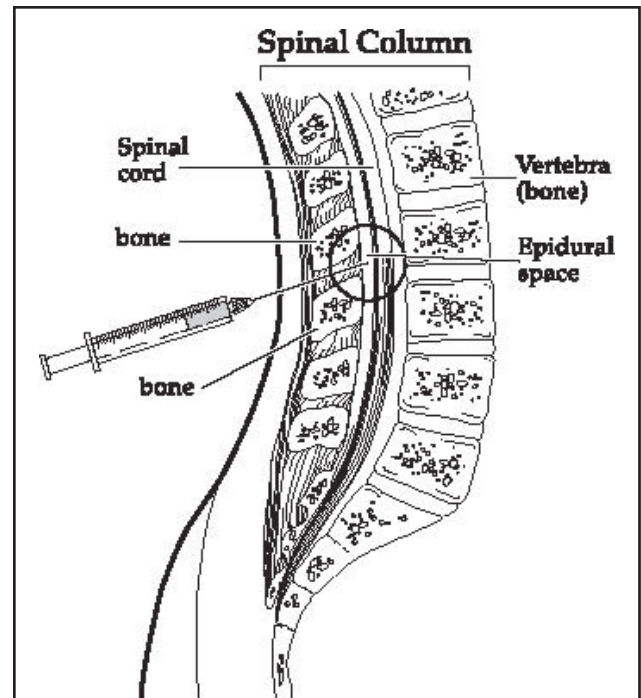
A catheter (small plastic tube) is placed in your back. The tip of the catheter rests in the area just outside the spinal cord. This area is called the epidural space. Medicines are injected through the catheter into the epidural space to control pain.

Your anesthesiologist (a doctor who specializes in anesthesia and pain management) will insert the catheter and give you the pain medicine.

Using an epidural means you won't need as much medicine. You will also be less sedated so you can take an active role in your recovery.

## During the Procedure

- You will sit bent over or lie on your side.
- Your back will be carefully cleaned.
- The anesthesiologist will numb your skin. You may feel a slight burning (like sunburn) for a few seconds.
- Once your skin is numb, the anesthesiologist places a special epidural needle into your back in the epidural space. This space is near your spinal fluid. (See the drawing on the right.)
- He or she threads the catheter through the epidural needle.



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**The place in your spinal column where the epidural is placed.**

- The anesthesiologist removes the epidural needle and tapes the catheter to your back.
- The catheter will come up over your shoulder so the nurses or doctors have easy access to it.
- The nurses will watch you closely during and after the medicine is given.
- Your doctor may have you hooked up to a machine to check your breathing. If you need this, the nurse will explain it to you.

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## After the Procedure

- Pain medicine enters your body through this catheter. The medicine can be given without stopping or from time to time.
- You may also receive other pain medicines in addition to the epidural. Your anesthesiologist will prescribe what is right for you.
- The catheter will likely be left in place for 1 to 2 days. You may need it for a longer period of time.

## Side Effects

- You may get a headache.
- Your lower back may become tender at the catheter entry site.
- Your blood pressure may drop at times.
- You have a very slight risk of:
  - bleeding around your spinal cord
  - infection near your spinal cord
  - injury to your spinal cord.

## When To Call Your Nurse

Call for a nurse if you have:

- nausea
- vomiting
- itching
- problems urinating
- changes in your pain or comfort level
- extreme back pain
- inability to move your legs.