

Important Notes:

- Lower dose local anesthetic/pain medication mixtures are used to help minimize some of these side effects and increase your ability to walk with assistance.
- Epidurals do not increase your likelihood for a cesarean delivery and may improve your chance of a spontaneous vaginal delivery.
- Most epidurals have been shown to be a safe and effective way for labouring patients to manage their pain.



How is the Epidural performed?

- A small plastic catheter is inserted into your arm, called an intravenous (IV).
- You will be repositioned on your side or sit at the side of the bed.

- The Anesthesiologist will:
 - clean your back with an antiseptic solution
 - inject local anesthetic to numb your skin
 - insert an epidural needle between the bones in your lower back
 - insert a thin plastic catheter through the hollow epidural needle
 - remove the needle leaving the plastic catheter in place which is taped to your back
 - inject the local anesthetic/pain medication mixture through the catheter
 - set up an epidural pump so you may be given extra medication either as a continuous infusion, or to allow you to give yourself extra medication when you feel you need it.

What is a Combined Spinal Epidural (CSE)?

The anesthesiologist injects a very small amount of fast-acting medication into the spinal space and then places the epidural catheter as described above. This extra step may be considered if you are in very early labour and would like to walk around or you are in very advanced labour and you need faster pain relief.

Where can I get more information?

Please ask to speak with an Anesthesiologist.

Epidural and Combined Spinal Epidural Information



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This brochure provides information on **Epidural** and **Combined Spinal Epidural (CSE)** methods of pain relief in labour. This information will help patients make an informed decision when providing consent.

These medical procedures are provided by specially trained medical doctors called Anesthesiologists. The Anesthesiologist's goal is to provide this pain relief service when requested. However, due to other emergency priorities, the Anesthesiologist may not be immediately available.



What is an epidural?

An epidural is a method of providing pain relief. It may not remove all pain but can greatly reduce it. A thin plastic tube called a catheter is placed in the epidural space outside the lining of your spinal canal. A local anesthetic/pain medication mixture is put into this tube to numb the nerves coming from your uterus and birth canal. Pain relief usually begins in 10-15 minutes and is complete by 20-30 minutes.

What about possible side effects?

For the Mother:

- Not all epidurals work perfectly; about 10% leave a portion(s) of your belly "unfrozen". This is called a patchy block. About 3-5% of epidural catheters need to be replaced if this occurs.
- You may shiver as the epidural begins to work.
- Your blood pressure may go down, therefore it is checked frequently.
- You may have local back discomfort or tenderness from bruising; this will go away. There is no evidence that epidurals cause chronic low back pain.
- You may not be able to urinate on your own and may require a small tube or catheter to empty your bladder.
- You may experience a spinal headache if the epidural needle goes beyond the epidural space into the spinal space. This happens in fewer than 1/100 patients (procedures).

Rare:

- A nerve may be damaged. It usually recovers completely. (This can happen during birth without an epidural).

Very rare:

- A nerve may have permanent damage.
- Paralysis could occur from an epidural hematoma.
- You could develop an infection in your back, or meningitis.
- You may have an allergic reaction to the medication; this may range from a minor reaction such as a rash, to a major reaction called anaphylaxis.

For the Baby:

- Your baby's heart rate may go down in the first 30 minutes. This usually happens because your blood pressure has gone down. Both your baby's heart rate and your blood pressure are monitored closely during this time.
- You may develop a fever after the epidural has been in place for several hours. This is not an infection but may lead to additional blood tests for you and your baby once born.
- Your labour may slow down and your doctor may order a medication to increase your contractions.
- You may find it harder to effectively push. You may need assistance with delivery.