

An epidural is a very small catheter that is placed in the back and used for pain management. This catheter delivers numbing medicine to the nerves that carry the sensation of pain. This medicine blocks the pain sensation directly until the catheter is taken out. This will make you numb on your belly, but you can still feel and move your arms and legs.

A special pump gives you medicine continuously through your epidural to keep you comfortable. This kind of pain control lowers the need for other pain medicines that have more side effects, like nausea, sleepiness, and itching.

When will my epidural be put in?

- If you receive an epidural, it will be put in before you go to the operating room.
- Before it is put in, you may get a medicine to help you relax. Being relaxed will help you stay in the right position while your epidural is being put in.
- You will be sitting up in bed with your shoulders and upper back slouched while your epidural is put in. It is important for you to sit very still while the epidural is being placed. The only pain you will feel is a small pinch and burning sensation. This is from the numbing medicine that is put in the skin of your back. The epidural is put in through the numbed area. You may feel some pressure, but it should not hurt.

Why do we use epidurals for pain?

If needed for your surgery, epidurals help to give you pain medicine exactly where your pain is located. There are some benefits to epidurals that can help you recover quicker and go home sooner:

- It does not make you sleepy or feel sick to your stomach (nausea).
- Reduces the risk of blood clots in your legs or lungs.
- Lowers the risk of chest infections.
- Helps your bowel function return so you can eat and drink sooner after your surgery.

How will my epidural be managed during my stay?

An anesthesiology pain doctor will visit you every day in the hospital. If you need more or less pain medicine through your epidural, this pain doctor can help with that. Your epidural will be stopped when you no longer need it for pain relief, up to 5 days after surgery.

Possible Side Effects

The side effects of epidurals include:

- Low blood pressure.
- Itching.
- Headache.
- Mild soreness where your epidural was put in your back.
- Some people also do not have complete pain control. If this happens, other types of pain medicine can be used.
- Very rarely, a skin infection can happen where your epidural is placed. To prevent this, your skin will be carefully cleaned. After the epidural is placed a dressing will be put on the area.
- Other very rare complications include nerve damage, epidural infection, epidural hematoma (blood clot). These complications happen less than 1 in 100,000 patients.