

Patient Information

Caudal Epidural Injection

What is a caudal epidural injection?

A caudal epidural injection is a mixture of local anaesthetic and hydrocortisone (steroid) around the areas of inflammation in the spinal canal. This is used when the nerves in the lower back are inflamed due to irritation from either spinal stenosis (a degenerative narrowing of the spinal canal) or a disc prolapse. In addition to the mechanical irritation, there can also be a chemical irritation to nerves from chemicals that can be released from a damaged disc. The injection is not a cure, but aims to alleviate your pain by reducing the inflammation caused by both the mechanical and chemical irritation of the nerves.

How do we do it?

Your caudal epidural is done by Dr Ratahi with an assisting nurse. The procedure is carried out as a day case in a treatment room at Northland Orthopaedic Centre.

After arriving and checking in at reception:

- You will be asked to read and sign a form giving your consent to the procedure.
- You will be taken to the room where the procedure is performed.
- You will be asked to lie comfortably face down with a pillow under your pelvis.
- Your injection is carried out through a small opening at the base of the spine just above the tailbone.
- The skin over the area for injection is cleaned with antiseptic solution.
- A local anaesthetic is injected into your skin.
- A needle is then passed through a gap between the tailbone and the last segment of the sacrum.
- An ultrasound device may be used to guide the needle into the epidural space.
- The mixture of local anaesthetic and steroid is slowly injected.
- The procedure usually takes 10-20 minutes plus recovery time.

What happens after the procedure?

- Following your injection you will return to the waiting room where you will stay with us for a short period of monitoring before you go home.
- You may experience numbness and/or relief of your pain for several hours after your injection.

- You will need someone to take you home and preferably stay with you for the next 24hrs.
- Before you leave we would prefer that you attempt to pass urine.
- You will have a small dressing at the injection site. Please remove this the following day.
- Pain may return around the injection site as the local anaesthetic wears off. Some people experience an initial increase in pain and stiffness that may continue for several days. If necessary, an ice pack can be applied to the area, 20 minutes at a time, for 1 -2 days following the procedure. You may also need to take simple pain killers.
- If successful, the steroid may then take several days for the benefits to be noticed. Additionally you may feel flushed in the face and/or notice a change in your mood for a few days. Diabetic patients may notice a rise in their blood sugar levels.
- In the days following the procedure, gradually increase your activities as tolerated.
- If you notice any swelling or bleeding from the site, experience any fever, urinary retention, severe headache, increasing weakness and numbness or have any other concerns, contact your General Practitioner or the Emergency Department of your local hospital.

What are the risks?

Infection – there is a risk of infection at the injection site, but this is rare due to the use of sterile techniques

Dural Puncture – there is a small risk of headaches if the needle punctures the lining that surrounds the nerves.

Haematoma – there is a very small risk of haematoma forming around the nerves causing further compression. This is normally only a problem in patients who are on medication to thin their blood (aspirin / warfarin / clopidogrel). You must inform us if you are on any of these drugs, as they will need to be stopped for a few days before your injection.

Temporary numbness and bladder disturbance – following the injection you may experience some numbness between your legs and extending into the tops of your thighs. This is due to the local anaesthetic effect on the nerves, and wears off after a few hours. Occasionally, the local anaesthetic can also affect the nerves to your bladder, disturbing your bladder function for a few hours. You should try to pass urine before you go home.

Injection site discomfort – following the injection you may have some localized discomfort at the injection site. It should settle over a few days, but you may benefit from taking simple pain killers and applying ice packs as described above.

Allergic reaction – an allergic reaction to injected steroid is incredibly rare. However, you must inform us of any known allergies beforehand.

What is your expected outcome?

Approximately 65% of people have a good response following a caudal epidural. However, the benefits are not always long lasting. The hydrocortisone can take up to a couple of weeks to have its effect, so you may not notice an immediate benefit.