

A02lite Epidural Anaesthetic

This document will give you information about an epidural anaesthetic. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is an epidural?

An epidural anaesthetic involves injecting drugs into an area called the epidural space near the spinal cord. The drugs numb your nerves to give pain relief in certain areas of your body. Epidurals can be used either on their own while you are awake, or together with a sedative or general anaesthesia. They can also be used after your operation to give effective pain relief.

The epidural can be maintained by giving extra doses when needed or by giving a continuous low dose.

What does the procedure involve?

Your anaesthetist will insert an epidural catheter using a needle (see figure 1). They will then inject a small amount of drug through the catheter to check the position. Once they have completed this check, they will give more of the drug until the epidural is working properly.

The effect of the epidural can be varied by changing the type and amount of drug given.

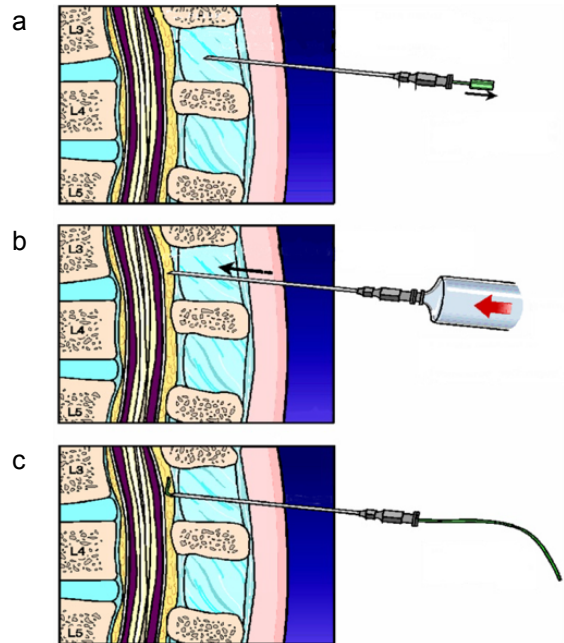


Figure 1

An epidural catheter being inserted

- A needle is inserted into your back
- Once the needle reaches the epidural space, a test is carried out to check the position
- A catheter is placed in the epidural space and the needle removed

What complications can happen?

- Failure of the epidural
- Low blood pressure
- Headache
- Respiratory depression
- Itching
- Bladder-emptying problems
- Leg weakness
- Backache
- Infection around the spine
- Cardiac arrest
- Seizures, due to the local anaesthetics
- Unexpected high block
- Blood clot around the spine
- Damage to nerves
- Paralysis or death

Summary

An epidural can be used for most people, usually giving a safe and effective form of pain relief both during and after your operation.

Further information

- NHS smoking helpline on 0800 022 4 332 and at www.smokefree.nhs.uk
- www.eatwell.gov.uk – for advice on maintaining a healthy weight
- www.eidoactive.co.uk – for information on how exercise can help you
- www.aboutmyhealth.org – for support and information you can trust
- Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland at www.aagbi.org
- Royal College of Anaesthetists at www.rcoa.ac.uk
- Royal College of Anaesthetists and Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland www.youranaesthetic.info
- NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (0845 606 46 47 – textphone)

Acknowledgements

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Issued June 2010

Expires end of December 2010



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