

# Epidural Pain Control: What is it?

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Epidurals have been used for pain relief during childbirth for many years. More recently doctors started to use epidural pain therapy to manage pain after surgery.

## **Pain control after surgery**

Good pain control after surgery is very important for the following reasons:

- It reduces stress and discomfort.
- It enables you to get out of bed sooner, stand upright and move around. This is important because being in bed increases the risk for pneumonia and other side-effects, such as blood clots in the legs.
- Pain may prevent you from deep breathing and doing coughing exercises which prevent pneumonia.
- Better pain control may shorten your stay at the hospital. Patients with shorter hospital stays have fewer problems after surgery.

In summary, good pain control will speed up your recovery process and allow you to return to your favorite activities sooner.

## **What are the advantages of epidural pain therapy?**

Epidurals give very good pain relief. Epidurals stop your pain early and block it along its path to your brain. They usually cause less sleepiness, nausea, vomiting and constipation than medicine given through an IV or as a shot.

## **Who can have epidural pain control?**

We can use epidural pain control for almost any surgery below the upper chest. This includes surgery on the aorta, gallbladder, prostate, knee, and hip. Epidurals are also effective for women who have hysterectomies. Children can also benefit from this method of pain control.

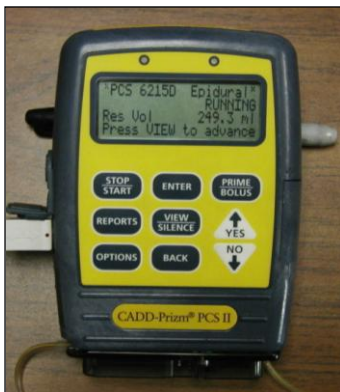
Some patients may not have the option of using this type of pain control because of other health history, such as taking blood thinners. Ask your surgeon if epidural pain control would be good for you.

Epidural pain control will be used only if you, your surgeon, and the anesthesiologist all agree to use the epidural catheter. An anesthesiologist can discuss an epidural with you in more detail and answer your questions. We support quality pain control and encourage you to take an active part in making decisions about your health care.

**An anesthesiologist** is a medical doctor who specializes in giving drugs to control pain before, during, and after surgery.

### How does the epidural catheter work?

Near the time of your surgery the anesthesiologist will place a thin, plastic hollow tube (which looks like fishing line) in between two spine bones in your back. This plastic tube is called an “Epidural Catheter”. The exact location where the catheter will be placed in your back depends on the type of surgery you will have and the medicine you will receive. For example, the catheter may be placed in the lower back for knee surgery or higher up for bladder surgery.



The catheter is held in place by special tape. You will be able to lie on your back without causing any problems to the catheter. The doctor will attach a small pump, the size of your hand, to the epidural catheter. The pump is set to give you pain medication around the clock. The medication includes an opioid, or pain medicine, and a local anesthetic drug. The epidural catheter delivers the drugs directly into the nerve roots in your back. This will lessen the amount of pain you feel.

### What to expect after Surgery

After surgery the nurse will check on you often to make sure you are safely recovering from surgery. The nurse will:

- Check your vital signs such as your temperature and blood pressure.
- Ask you to describe how much pain you are having on a 0 to 10 scale. 0 means you have no pain and 10 is the worst pain you can imagine. **We use various**

**pain scales to rate your pain** and will also ask you to describe your pain with words. The information you give us will help the team to understand your condition and better care for your pain.

- Ask you to move your feet and legs to make sure you are safe to return to your normal activities. Always tell your nurse if you have new weakness or numbness in your legs.

The Acute Pain Service will visit you every morning while your epidural catheter is in place. We are available 24 hours a day to help control your pain.

### **What are the possible side-effects?**

Side-effects after epidurals may occur, but most are easy to treat. **Make sure to tell your nurse** if you have any of the following signs and symptoms so he can give you medications or take other steps to improve them.

- Itching.
- Nausea and/or vomiting.
- Numbness. One of the medications may cause this side-effect. Your nurse may need to adjust the medicine to resolve this.
- Difficult urination. This may be the result of your surgery, medications, and/or the epidural. Most patients with epidural pain control have a drainage catheter in their bladder. Your ability to pass urine should return to normal when the epidural wears off.

Other side-effects may also occur. **Tell your nurse** if you have any feelings of pain or discomfort as soon as possible.

### **Do you have more questions?**

Please contact the Adult Acute Pain Service at 734-936-4280.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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