

# Epidural Anesthesia

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*For easing the pain  
of childbirth*

**Centra Health**

*The experience  
you're looking for*

## Epidural Anesthesia

Epidural anesthesia is a form of pain relief which decreases sensation in the lower part of your body while you remain conscious. An epidural block may be used to relieve the pain of labor and vaginal delivery as well as provide anesthesia for Cesarean delivery.

## How Epidural Anesthesia Is Given

The anesthesiologist will cleanse your lower back with antiseptic solution and numb the skin between the spine's vertebrae. A special needle is used to locate the epidural space just outside the spinal fluid sac. A tiny plastic tube is placed through the needle, the needle is removed and the tube is taped to the skin. Your anesthesiologist may elect to use a pump to continuously give you anesthetic medication for the duration of your labor and delivery. The onset of pain relief is gradual and occurs within 10 to 20 minutes after the anesthetic is injected.

During the administration of epidural anesthesia, the mother receives intravenous (IV) fluids and her vital signs are continuously monitored. The baby is monitored with an electronic fetal monitor.

## Benefits Of Epidural Anesthesia

Epidural anesthesia allows the mother to receive pain relief while remaining fully alert and able to participate in the childbirth experience. Considerable research has shown that epidural anesthesia is safe for both mother and baby, causing little or no effect on the baby.

An additional benefit is that once you have an epidural anesthetic, a stronger anesthetic may be injected through the catheter if your obstetrician decides to perform a Cesarean delivery. This will allow you to remain fully conscious during the delivery as well as avoid the risks of general anesthesia.

With epidural anesthesia, most women can feel the pressure of the contractions, but not the pain. Your anesthesiologist can adjust the degree of numbness that you have. It is completely normal for your legs to feel numb, heavy or slightly weak during epidural anesthesia.

## Some Possible Side Effects

Epidural anesthesia is very safe. However, complications may occur, even though you are monitored carefully and your anesthesiologist takes special precautions to avoid them.

A drop in the mother's blood pressure may occur, but this can easily be treated. A headache may develop if a puncture in the sac containing spinal fluid occurs during the procedure, and this also can be treated. Other complications are extremely rare and include convulsions and temporary weakness of the chest muscles. To guard against these and even more unlikely reactions, your anesthesiologist will evaluate your condition, make medical judgments, take safety precautions and provide necessary treatment during the procedure.

Epidural anesthesia may allow contractions if it is given early in labor. It may also decrease the urge to push and slightly prolong this last phase of labor. Occasionally, the obstetrician may need to assist some women with forceps or a vacuum instrument.

Infrequently, an epidural may not provide adequate anesthesia at the time of delivery. Your obstetrician or the anesthesiologist present at your delivery will then give you another anesthesia medicine.

## Is An Epidural Anesthesia Right For You?

The decision to have an epidural must be agreed on by you, your obstetrician and an anesthesiologist. It is recommended that you discuss this decision with a physician prior to your hospitalization. If you request an epidural block, your

obstetrician and anesthesiologist will evaluate you and your baby taking into account your state of health and past anesthetic experiences, the progress of your labor and the baby's responses. An anesthesiologist is available 24 hours a day to provide epidural anesthesia.

## Cost Of Epidural Anesthesia

The administration of epidural anesthesia is a service provided by the Anesthesiology Department at Virginia Baptist Hospital. You will be billed by Anesthesiology Services of Lynchburg for professional services of the anesthesiologist. Please note that your hospitalization insurance may not fully cover the cost. There is also a variable cost for supplies that will appear on your hospital bill.

## For More Information

We would be happy to answer any questions you might have about epidural anesthesia. Please feel free to call the Anesthesiology Department at Virginia Baptist Hospital, (434) 947-4633, weekdays between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., and ask to speak to an anesthesiologist.



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# Centra Health

## Virginia Baptist Hospital

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